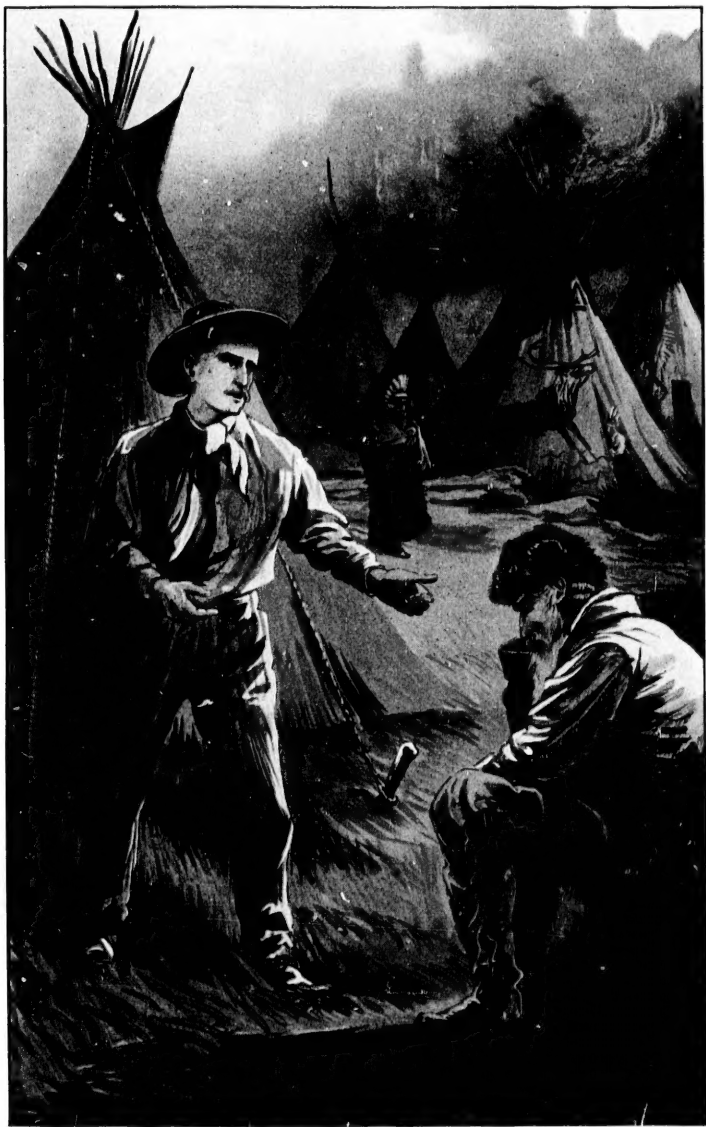




"DEBRETT! CHARLIE, OLD MAN, DON'T YOU KNOW ME?"—See p. 297.

OFF TO KLONDYKE

OR

A COWBOY'S RUSH TO THE GOLD FIELDS

BY

GORDON STABLES, M.D., C.M.

(SURGEON ROYAL NAVY)

AUTHOR OF "A FIGHT FOR FREEDOM," "THE PEARL DIVERS,"
"THE CRUISE OF THE ROVER CARAVAN," "FROM
PLUGGERSHARE TO PULPIT," ETC., ETC.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY CHARLES WHYMPER

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To My Dear Sister

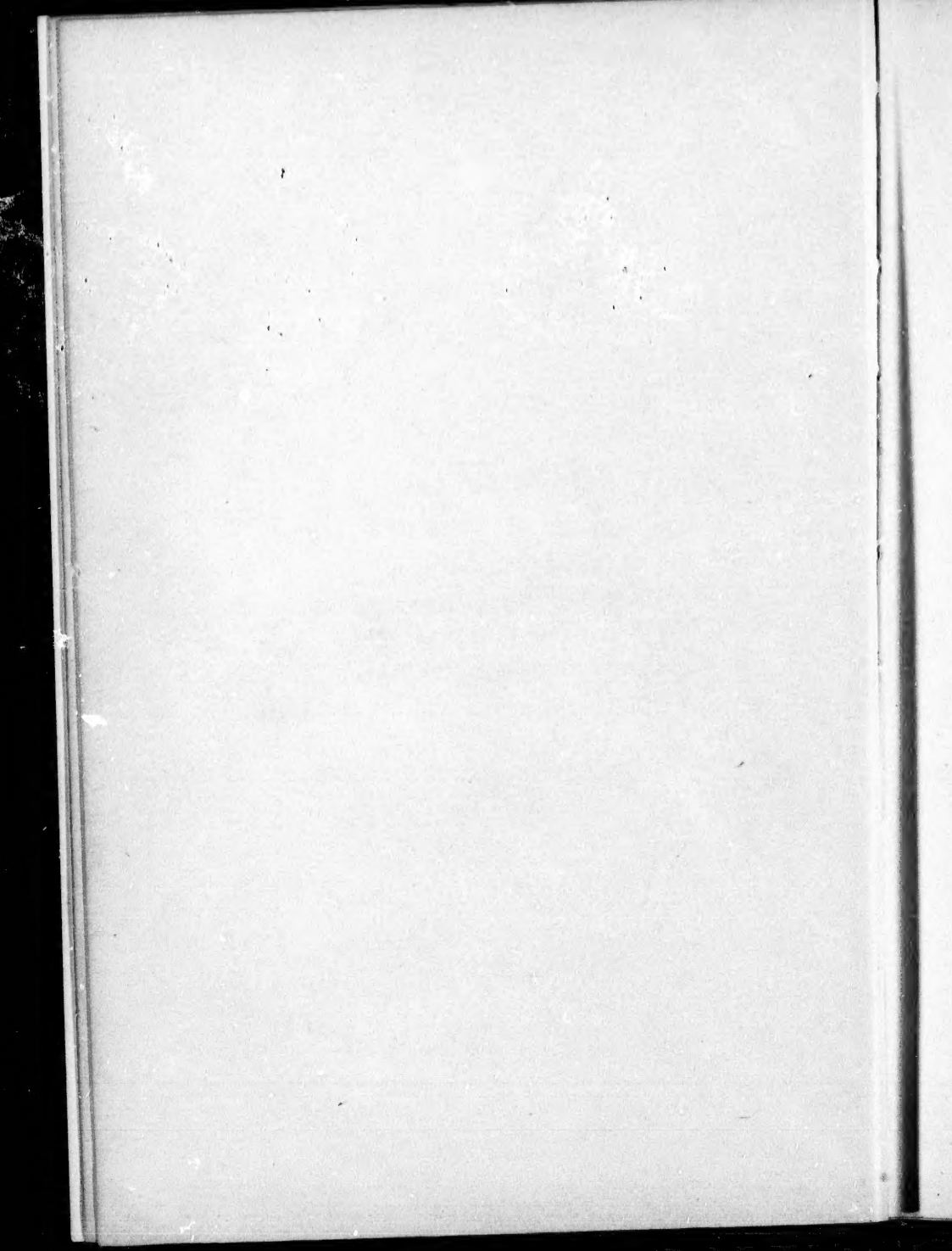
MARY

I DEDICATE THIS BOOK

WITH FONDEST LOVE AND THOUGHTS OF

'AULD LANG SYNE'

THE AUTHOR



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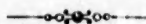
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OFF TO KLONDYKE;

OR,

A COWBOY'S RUSH TO THE GOLD FIELDS



CHAPTER I

ABROAD ON THE MOORLANDS

"Now stir the fire and close the shutters fast,
Let fall the curtains, wheel the sofa round,
And while the bubbling and loud hissing urn
Throws up a steaming column, and the cups
That cheer but not inebriate wait on each,
So let us welcome peaceful evening in." — COWPER.

MANY of those bramble berries were already ripe, and rich and black; but some were as red as the cheeks of Leebie Lea, and others as brown as the sunburned face of her little gipsy-looking brother Laurie.

When I say that, although Leebie was comfortably shod, and wore a neatly be-ribboned straw hat over her long yellow hair, Laurie was barefooted and bare-ankled, it will easily be believed that they did not belong to the aristocracy of this noble land of ours.

Nor were they what are called "poor children," as will presently be seen.

The sun had just gone down, and look in whatever direction they might, not a house or hut was to be seen on this vast moorland or plain. To all appearance the children were many and many a long mile from home, wherever that might be. This did not seem to trouble them in the least; for Leebie, as she continued to gather the blackberries, sang sweetly to herself in happy childish treble.

But Laurie had turned his back to the great bramble bush and his face to the west. That face was beaming, and his dark blue eyes were sparkling with a light that seemed lent from the gorgeous sunset sky. Surely there was something of the poet and naturalist about the lad, for the tears were trembling on his long eyelashes.

"Oh, Leebie!" he cried at last, "why don't you look upwards?"

The girl paused now, and did glance towards the west, and an exclamation of wonder and admiration escaped her.

"Oh, Laurie, how pretty!" she cried. "Who painted that sky, I wonder!"

"Why, God, of course, Leebie. Doesn't he paint everything that is beautiful—the wild flowers, the trees, and the red heather, and the wings of that bird yonder that is singing in the thorn?"

"Yes," assented Leebie, nodding gravely, "of course it is God, but I was nearly forgetting."

And here was an autumn sunset such as is seldom seen in this country. High above, the great sky-dome

itself was clear and cloudless and of a pale blue colour, with just one strip of shining crimson. But it was down towards the horizon where the chief beauty lay. For the clouds here were splendidly striated and streaked, the layers deep orange in colour, purple, grey, and vermilion, with betwixt the orange and the red, canals of pale green empty sky. Then close to the horizon was a bank of misty grey.

One glance at the children standing there with faces upturned and hands shading their eyes from the dazzling, heavenly light, would have told you that while Leebie was really a beautiful and intelligent-looking child of about ten, Laurie, perhaps three years her senior, was a truly manly and handsome English boy.

Oh, they are no rarity in this dear country of ours. I could find you many in my own village here, and it is just such boys as Laurie that, when they grow up to be men, fight our battles among the wild and far-off hills of India, or in African jungles, and perform deeds of valour which make the blood tingle within our veins, as we read of them at our quiet fireside in England.

But Leebie and Laurie are not the only living creatures in this lonesome, hobgoblin moorland. No, for yonder there comes trotting towards them, on four legs apiece and cheek by jowl, two very interesting persons indeed.

Let me introduce them.

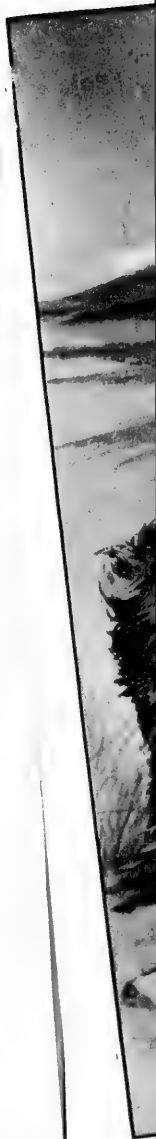
I. Sir Duncan Currie!

II. Towsie!

While their little master and mistress have been filling that basket with ripe blackberries, the two dogs have been far away across the plains, hunting on their own account. No, not altogether on their own account, either, for behold! Towsie, an old-fashioned, English sheep-dog is carrying a large, wild rabbit, and Sir Duncan, a daft, wee, wiry, Aberdeen terrier, though he carries no rabbit, looks full of importance. He is trying to tell Laurie that, although he graciously permits Towsie to bear the bunny along, had it not been for him, Laurie would not now be looking forward to so nice a supper.

Very full, indeed, of self-importance was this same Sir Duncan. Indeed, I always think that the smaller a dog — or a man either — is, the more he thinks of himself; the more conceited he is.

At first glance nobody could have said that Sir Duncan was a deal to look at. Grey in colour was he, with smartly pricked ears, which gave him the appearance of being always on the *qui vive*; a smartly carried tail, which he seemed very proud of, but rather short in legs, in body, and in hair. This last was very close and almost as thick and hard as pin wire. A thunder-shower could not have soaked Sir Duncan to the skin, nor could earth or dust ever penetrate that hirsute mantle of his. Sir Duncan's toilet was exceedingly simple. He just gave himself a shake, or on rare occasions two, and lo! there he was, ready for anything. Sir Duncan Currie was





SIR DUNCAN CURRIE AND TOWSIE.



brave to the core. There was nothing he would not have attacked, from a weasel, or polecat, to a wild, horned bull, and when he went on the war-path, he went to win. His teeth had all the whiteness of alabaster, but were as strong as Highland dirks. Sharp and quick was Sir Duncan and easy to take offence, but it could not be said that he was bad in temper. He possessed a loving wee heart of his own, and when he looked at his master or mistress it shone out through a pair of the darkest and brownest of eyes that any one ever beheld.

I believe, moreover, that he was proud of his constant companion, Towsie.

And this affection Towsie, a bob-tailed, wall-eyed, old-fashioned English sheep-dog, fully reciprocated, though he was older and more sedate than little Currie, as he was usually called for short. As Burns says, —

“Nae doubt but they were fain o’ ither
An’ unco pack and thick thegither;
Wi’ social nose whiles snuffed and snowkit¹
Whiles mice and moudiewarts they howkit,²
Whiles scoured awa in lang excursion,
An’ worried ither in diversion.”

Nevertheless Currie possessed a very strong sense of the ridiculous, and there were times when out on the moorland or plains, that all at once, after a glance or two at Towsie, his shape — so different from his own — struck him as so irresistibly comical

¹ Scented.

² Dug up.

that, with his teeth showing, all agrin with laughing, he was fain to allay his feelings by rushing round and round his companion, in wide and wider circles, till, fairly exhausted, he would tumble on the grass.

"Oh, Towsie, Towsie!" he seemed to say, "you'll be the death of me, some day. When I look at you, I feel fit to choke with merriment. Never an ear to be seen; heather instead of hair; one brown eye blinking out of your shaggy face, and one the colour of an old china plate,—and oh, Towse, not even the stump of a tail! How ever your mother let you out like that, *I* could never tell!"

Then, as if afraid he had offended honest Towsie, he would trot up and kiss him.

"Never mind me, Towsie," he would say, "I must have a bit o' fun sometimes. I'm that way built, you know."

Well, Sir Duncan Currie could catch every creature of ordinary size that ran. Mice and rats he worried as quickly as one could wink. One bite was enough for a weasel or martin, and two for a polecat. He would drag a badger from his lair, and even fight a fox. But away in the woods, he would sit at the foot of a great oak tree, and bark with vexation, at a squirrel high up among the green swaying boughs quietly eating an acorn; for climbing trees was far beyond even Sir Duncan's power. But often and often he stalked and caught birds on the ground; and more than once he had come proudly back to his master and laid a plump and

lovely partridge at his feet. This only in early autumn, for during the nesting season Laurie kept both his dogs close to heel.

I think that the greatest sorrow in Currie's heart sprang from the fact that he could not catch a species of snipe, common enough near the pools where the wild ducks had their nests.

For clever and all though he was, this doggie couldn't fly, but he would sit on one end with his black dot of a nose in the air, watching that snipe till it was no longer visible, and wish he only had wings.

Because this particular species of snipe seemed to call his name. This was only the bird's cry, but it really was very tantalising.

"Currie, Currie, Currie, Currie!"

"Oh," Sir Duncan appeared to say, "*I* would Currie you, if I could only just catch you!"

Well, on this particular evening, Towsie laid the rabbit very gently down at his master's feet, and received from both children a deal of praise and cuddling.

With her arms around the honest dog's neck as she knelt beside him, — bareheaded now, for her hat had fallen off, — Leebie and he made a pretty picture.

As for Sir Duncan Currie he had quite taken possession of his master, and seemed determined that Towsie should not have a single caress.

* * * * *

But by this time the beauty had begun to fade

away from the cloudscape; that strip of cirrus that erst was so brightly crimson had already changed to bronze, and the bars that lay along the lower part of the sky were now purple and grey.

Laurie took a piece of twine from his pocket — what country boy ever goes abroad without this — and, tying the rabbit's fore and hind feet together, slung it over his shoulder.

"Come on, Leebie," he cried. "Why, it will be almost dark before we get home!"

"Wowff! wowff! wowff!" barked Sir Duncan, running on excitedly in front, for hunting had made him hungry. But Towsie simply licked his master's hand with his warm tongue.

"I'll guide you safely home," he seemed to say, "should it be as dark as my coat."

It was quite half an hour, however, before they got clear of the plain and on to the road. And by this time it was dusk and a star or two were blinking and winking in the east.

When the road led them into and through a wood of oak trees, to which the brown leaves were still closely clinging, it was so dark that but for a long line of sky above, they could not have been able to see their way at all.

But Laurie was a cheerful boy, and now his voice was raised in song.

Only a simple English ditty that his father had taught him, but it sufficed to make the long road appear shorter.

In some measure Laurie was like the miller of Dee,
for he sang pretty well all day long.

“There was a jolly miller once
Lived on the river Dee;
He worked and sung from morn till night,
No lark more bright than he.

“And this the burthen of his song
Forever used to be,
‘I care for nobody, no, not I,
If nobody cares for me.’”

But in the present instance these words would have been far indeed from appropriate. For Laurie had some one to care for him.

Behold, they are clear of the woods at last, and about a hundred yards farther on, the bright light from a cottage window is streaming across a well-cultivated garden and across the road beyond.

And the children's mother is leaning over the gate. She has been awaiting their arrival anxiously enough. Both Towsie and Currie sprang forward with a joyful bound, and Leebie and Laurie speedily followed their leaders.

“Come in, my dears, come in,” said the mother. “You must both be cold and hungry, and your father and I were getting quite nervous about you.”

“No need, mother, no need. We've had such a splendid time of it. And look at the beautiful rabbit that Towsie brought me, and the lovely basketful of blackberries Leeb and I have picked!”

They were in the house by this time, and in the

room where father sat quietly reading the morning paper; for Mr. Lea was a farmer in a small way, and had but little time to read anything until the shades of evening fell and work was over for the day. But he was very glad to see the youngsters, and Leebie was soon on his knee—her favourite seat—telling him of all their adventures on the plains.

Well, Mrs. Lea now hurried away to superintend the skinning and stewing of that rabbit, and with mashed potatoes it made, indeed, a delightful supper, flanked by fragrant tea. Sir Duncan Currie sat on the hearth-rug looking at the cheerful fire of turf, wood, and coal, and beside him sat a huge, red tabby-cat, the two being on terms of great intimacy and friendship.

Towsie sat under the table, but no sooner was supper over than both dogs came out, expectant of their share. Nor were they disappointed.

Before retiring for the night the farmer took down

“The big, ha’ Bible, once his father’s pride,”

and the prayer-book as well, and conducted short but earnest devotions.

Happy, indeed, is the evening of a day that endeth thus.

CHAPTER II

A WILD RACE — THE CAVE ON THE MOOR

"I've wandered east, I've wandered west,
Through many a weary way,
But never, never can forget
The love of life's young day."

— WILLIAM MOTHERWELL.

MR. LEA'S farm was not a large one, nor was he ever likely to make a fortune on it. Indeed, as far as the world goes, he was really poor. True, he had not many children. Indeed, we have already become acquainted with all he had; but the farm had to be tilled, and so there were men and horses to keep and pay for, and the honest fellow was always pleased if, about Christmas time, when he reckoned up his books on the debit and credit side, he found that ends not only met, but lapped a little way over.

But he was not rich enough to send Leebie and Laurie to a far-off boarding-school, even if he had cared to part with them. And of course to send them to the village board school was out of the question. So they had a somewhat clever governess, who came shortly after breakfast, and taught them all the forenoon.

Then the children got the afternoon and evening

to themselves, and in fine weather spent most of their time on the upland moor or plain.

It was neither a moor nor a plain to them, however, but a boundless prairie; and no Indians in the far west of America ever ran more wild and free than they did here.

But the dogs were not their only companions, excellent though these were. No, for they had Bob and Neddy besides.

I may say at once that although Bob, a small little Shetland pony, belonged entirely to them, and was a very great pet, and a spoiled one too, Neddy the donkey was an inhabitant of the prairie. He dwelt there nearly all the year through, and no one seemed to own him or even know to whom he belonged. But he had attached himself very much to Leebie and Laurie Lea, he was a great friend of Bob's, and on the most intimate terms with the dogs.

Unlike donkeys that are dragged up under man's cruel dominion, Neddy was as fleet as the wind that bent the reeds and grass on the prairie. Yet none the more averse was he to be ridden by Laurie. And the performance was a bareback one with just a rope instead of a bridle. It is true that the boy had a morsel of a whip, but he never touched Neddy therewith. It was merely meant to crack as he gave vent to a wild whoop, and went careering over the plain.

The day after the blackberrying expedition was to be a holiday. Miss May was going from home, so the two children would have all the long day to

themselves to do just as they pleased. Laurie, however, was by no means an idle boy, and stayed at home for two hours after breakfast, to assist his father in some of the lighter duties of the farm.

But Bob was brought out at last and saddled and bridled for Leebie to ride. The little rough-haired, long-tailed rascal knew he was going to have some real fine fun, and was full of life and go. He shook his great mane and neighed with delight, while the dogs, who were never so well pleased as when the Shetland formed one of the expedition, jumped up and kissed him, then barked in joy and wantonness, as they rushed round and round him on the road.

Right in front of the saddle was a mysterious-looking roll or parcel. But there really was no mystery about it. For it contained dinner for all hands including the dogs, of course.

It was a splendid morning when they started. Away to the west were glorious banks of rolling clouds, like icebergs draped with snow; the sky above them, a deep ethereal blue. But southeast by east, the clouds were grey, though fringed at the top with an irregular line of silver, and through the very centre of this bank, in a space of lurid brown, sailed the sun. No one could say he shone, so sadly shorn of his beams was he.

Although, when once fairly mounted, Leebie had a preliminary gallop, — she and her wild little steed, dogs and all, being speedily swallowed up by the forest, — they soon returned, and the real fun did not commence until the lad climbed the hill and reached

the boundary of the plain. And here was Neddy himself waiting for them. As soon as he saw the first head, and that was Leebie's, he lifted up that wonderful voice of his, and gave vent to a series of "Haw-hee's" that really seemed to make the welkin ring.

The "Haw" was on a low bass key, the "Hee" was a high tenor, shrieked and long drawn out.

Never mind, it sounded like "*Lau-rie! Laurie!*" and really was a pæan of joy and welcome, or meant to be.

And now Neddy must fling his heels in the air, and after receiving a kiss from the dogs, rush forward to rub noses with Bob. After this Laurie put his bridle on and mounted him bareback, of course; for the boy had that fast and secure grip of the knees, which enabled him to ride any horse without a saddle.

"Hurrah!" cried Laurie. "Hurrah! Leebie! Hurrah! Now for a ride over the boundless prairie. Follow me. Whoop!"

That wild "whoop!" of Laurie's would have done credit to a Chik-Chek Indian.

Laurie deserted the road entirely now, and Leebie followed suit. It is true, the plain was somewhat lumpy and, owing to the number of large stones about, not altogether safe; but the youngsters did not mind that, and if the riders did not care, certainly the steeds didn't. Laurie was evidently going to make a bee-line straight for a cave about a mile distant.

Leebie bent down and patted Bob, and then Bob knew it was to be a race between him and Neddy, and that he must overtake him before he reached the cave, or fall dead in his tracks.

He neighed a wild defiance, then started off at a rate that defies description. But Neddy was a long way ahead from the first, and for a time it seemed that he was actually increasing it.

Leebie now grew excited, and every minute the Shetland was warming more and more to his work.

Over and over again she patted his shoulder. "Go on, good Bobbie! go on!" she cried. "Come, Bobbie, come, we mustn't be beaten!"

Bobbie didn't mean to be, if he could help it; for the pony had the grit in him, as Yankees say. Well, they tell me a donkey's gallop is short and sweet. Then Neddy's must have been an exception; for though the pony now gained on him hand over hand, the two wild steeds were hardly a hundred yards from the mouth of the cave before they were neck and neck.

Now came the tug of war. Whether Laurie had been saving Neddy's strength for the finish or not, I cannot say, but he suddenly gave him his head and all the encouragement in his power.

"Whoop! whoop! whoop!" he shouted.

Crack, crack, crack, went the whip. Surely no such race as this was ever run before, and no such Derby ever seen.

Neck and neck, head and head, till almost the fin-

ish. Then with a wild exultant cry Leebie set forward her little horse, till he seemed to fly, and won — by half a length.

Even the dogs had been left far in the rear, but as Laurie and Leebie stood there laughing right merrily, as they patted and petted Neddy and Bob, their canine friends came panting towards them.

And now Leebie's saddle and bridle, and Laurie's rope were taken off and the steeds were set free. "Mind," said Laurie, "you mustn't go very far away, and you must return whenever I whistle."

The cave, which they had now reached, was a strange one. A huge hillock of rock and stones and turf formed its roof, and among these furze was growing, while the entrance was entirely hidden by bushes.

But inside it was roomy and capacious enough, and, independent of a rude sort of chimney which gave exit to the smoke, there was an orifice on the west side, that admitted light enough for every useful purpose.

It was evident that this cave was a favourite resort with Laurie and his sister; for they had gone so far as to furnish it with a rough wooden table and seats, to say nothing of a large soft couch of heather and brackens, on which a tired man might well rest and sleep.

And here was wood in abundance, to say nothing of dry, hard peats. So Laurie set himself at once to light a fire, and soon its pleasant blaze, reflected from

the dark, rocky walls on every side, made the place look very cosy indeed, and very homelike, too.

It was a favourite resort with the boy and his sister, even in early spring before the woodlands were clad in tender green, while the weird spruce firs, and shaggy pines looked black in contrast with the bare grey branches of oak or sycamore, and while, with the exception of the dusky green leaves of the honeysuckle, scarce was a bud or burgeon to be seen on the hedgerows. The air at this time had hardly yet lost its wintry sting, it is true, but the wind that blew across the plain or prairie, though cold, was pure and fresh; so life and joy were in every breath they breathed.

But even then there was many a beautiful thing to be seen and admired, and young though even Leebie was, she was a creature of the wilds and loved nature in every form. She might have said with Milton in "Lycidas":—

"Throw hither all your quaint enamelled eyes,
That on the green turf suck the honeyed showers,
And purple all the ground with vernal flowers,
Bring the rathe primrose, that, forsaken, dies;
The tufted crow-toe, and pale jessamine,
The white pink, and the pansy freaked with jet,
The glowing violet,
The musk-rose, and the well-attired woodbine,
With cowslips wan that hang the pensive head,
And every flower that sad embroidery wears."

Well Leebie loved the early spring flowers, but

though she loved little creeping or flying things as well, she could not help pitying these because they had been born and sent out into the world too soon, and before the sun's rays had gathered strength enough to warm their tiny bodies.

Look at that lonesome wee lady bird, for instance, in jacket of bright vermilion spotted with black. Not one of its kindred is it likely to meet anywhere in these wilds. It climbs a stalk of withered grass, spreads wide its cloak, and attempts to fly. But the wind chills its tender wings and soon down it drops, and presently the rose-linnet spies it, and the lady-bird is no longer left in misery.

Or look at yonder little blue butterfly. Was it born this spring, Leebie wonders, or did it lie hiding in some cosy crevice all the winter through, till the spring sunshine lured it forth? It, also, is searching in vain for one of its kindred to play with and to love. Alas! there is none; but a yellow-billed blackbird has seen it and seized it. Just for a moment or two the blue wings ornament the cheeks of the bonny, bonny bird, then that early butterfly is swallowed and knows no more.

But both Laurie and his sister know something. They know where that yellow-bill has his nest in the furze, which already is green, and where also the rose-linnet has his; and how they are built, and how they are lined, and how many pretty eggs each. Both birds cease to sing as the children approach the bushes where their homes are, but more mellow

and lively than before are their joy-notes when they pass on, after one or two admiring glances.

There are many more nests to be visited in early spring, many sweet and hardy wee wild flowers to be admired, and much more bird melody to be listened to with delight.

The opening summer, however, was the favourite season of all with Laurie and Leebie, when dainty May had already clad the trees in tenderest olives and sweetest greens, when the yellow, rich furze that hugged the moor scented all the air around, and the sward by the roadsides was a galaxy of bee-haunted beauty, — a beauty lent to it by the gowan, the

“Wee, modest, crimson-tipped flower,”

that Burns sang so sweetly of, the rich and tempting white of the clover, the deep orange but crimson-shaded bird's-foot trefoil, starry ox-eye daisies, and lovely blue of the modest speedwell.

Thus May would lead them, step by step, into the joy of June, when, although the nightingale ceased to sing, the woods, the copses, and the wild, wide moor itself, resounded with the happy voices of a thousand feathered songsters. Happy, did I say? Yea, verily, so happy that their melodies had at times an almost hysterical bubble in them, as if tears of joy were half choking them.

“O God, it was a holy time;
His breath was o'er the land.”

Would that we could all study His works more,

from the greatest even to the least. Grand indeed is the tiger that prowls silently through the jungles of India, and noble and majestic in his terrible strength the ice bear that stalks over the frozen and snow-clad seas of the Arctic; but in many of the tiniest insects that creep on the stalks of the green July heather or heath, there is a beauty that nothing else on earth can equal, far less surpass.

He does not really live who loves not nature; or who ne'er can see beauty and romance in a yellow primrose, and ne'er can feel

“The witchery of a soft blue sky.”

CHAPTER III

IN TOUCH WITH NATURE

"Go forth under the open sky, and list
To Nature's teachings."—BRYANT.

JUST as one who admires the picture of some famous artist is really honouring the maker thereof, so do we truly honour and worship God when we stand in silent awe and admiration before his wondrous works, be they treescapcs or seascapes, the marvels of the ever-changing sky, or the living creatures he cares for and loves.

"You will find," says Bolingbroke, "that it is the modest, not the presumptuous, inquirer who makes a real and safe progress in the discovery of divine truths. One must follow nature and nature's God—that is, he must follow God in his works and in his word."

Well, I have no desire to set my young hero, Laurie Lea, up for a saint. He was just a bold English boy, and I trust there are very many more like him. Somewhat different in type, however, from the majority of British lads, who are content to go through their "teens" and merge into manhood with their eyes shut, so far as nature is concerned.

Laurie was nothing unless a naturalist, and though his friend, Ernest Elliot, whom I shall presently introduce, used to listen to all he said with a good deal of pleasure, he himself preferred a fishing-rod or a ride across country to almost any other pleasure that life could afford.

Still, I cannot help saying that the young man who lives in the country, and does not take up natural history as a pursuit to some extent, is to be pitied. He is wilfully blind with his mental eyes, and denies himself one of the greatest pleasures in existence. But here is the great mistake people who desire to study nature make,—they commence with classification too soon, and so sicken themselves with long compound Latin or Greek names. Encourage young folks to study the natural history of their own gardens, or even to tell the life-story of a single tree from year's end to year's end; they will get more insight into nature while doing so than if they read a hundred dry-as-dust works of the most eminent naturalists. Classification will come in handy afterwards. Put a real naturalist down for six months in a potato patch, and he will write you a beautiful and interesting book thereon, with very little classification in it. Imprison him in a cellar and give him a candlelight, and in three months' time he will hand you a most readable book on the life he finds therein. I have met learned souls who were content to dismiss a bird by telling you its Latin name and classification. The sparrow, they would say, is the "Passer

domesticus," and belongs to the Nat. Fam. "Fringillidæ." And these men call themselves naturalists. If you dined with me, reader, I could undertake to talk about nothing save sparrows all the evening, and I do believe you would be sorry when bedtime came. And Laurie was just the same, and, mind you this, his character and history are sketched from the life; for every hero of mine has had his prototype.

Well, I cannot here repeat all that Laurie used to tell his young friend Ernest and his sister Leebie, who, I may inform you, boys, though you must not let it go any farther, was Ernest's little sweetheart.

But Laurie was very fond of his, or rather his father's, sparrows, and made them a study, and could tell many a story concerning their nature and habits not to be found in books.

Several of the poplar trees around his father's farm were covered, as to their stem, with ivy. This was a great roosting-place for flocks of these birds; so was the ivy over and at each side of the hall door. At sunset of an evening the babel, din, and squabbling for good places were incessant for fully half an hour; then all was peace till daybreak. In the wistaria and ivy were innumerable nests. These made shelters at night during winter for his pets. Up one gable of the stable grew a Gloire de Dijon rose tree. In this tree, during winter, the sparrows often built tiny shelter nests, or rather the females built them to keep their lords and masters snug and cosy. The

same sparrow sat night after night on the same rose twigs, under that verandah. Often a sparrow had two wives — more fool he, of course. One, who occupied a particular twig close to that lawn window, used to call his two wives every night, and send them to bed before he went himself. This bird used to have a big straw hung over him. If Laurie took it down, or it was blown away, another used to be hung up. The wives of this bigamist sparrow sometimes fought cruelly. The overmuch-married sparrow just looked on, and let them. "What can a poor fellow do?" he would say. "But," he added, "I'll know better another year!" So, you see, experience teaches sparrows as well as fools. Sparrows are fond of building under the eaves of thatched houses, in waterspouts, in chimneys, and in holes in old orchard trees. An old nest was often relined, and served again and again. They frequently ousted the swallows from their nests, but Laurie had never known the latter to clay them up.

In Laurie's father's orchard grew a great, gnarled old russet apple tree. With a very short fishing-rod he could touch a knot, at the union of two branches, which was hollow and had a tiny entrance hole. The knot was barely nine inches in diameter, and suitable, one would have thought, only for the nest of a wry-neck or wren; but, nevertheless, a pair of sparrows had lived there and reared families for several years, — unmolested, too, except from the occasional visit of an insolent starling on an egg-hunting expedition,

who, however, had always confined his audacity to peeping down into the nest with one eye and passing a few perhaps not overcomplimentary remarks. But once the tree and the hollow knot were occupied by the hen-sparrow and a young cock-sparrow, her son. The son was bigger than the mother, but had not yet completed his spring moult, though the black bib was advancing downwards from the chin. But the curious part of the business was this; the young cock never left the tree or went many twigs away from the nest. He simply sat there pluming his feathers, his mother coming about every ten minutes with something for him to eat. "Breet, breet, breet," she cried, which means "open you bill." Then she rammed the bread, or beetle, or larva right down his throat. As the young sparrow was somewhat hollow-eyed, he might have been sickly, but an instance of such maternal devotion, I think, deserves to be recorded.

Farmer Lea himself was a thinking man. Many farmers are. Nor did he keep his thoughts to himself, but oftentimes communicated his ideas to his wife, and others around him, while smoking his pipe at the cosy fireside of an evening.

It was evident that Laurie took after him; for Lea was himself a lover of nature, as may be seen from the following remarks he made to a neighbour who had dropped in one night to speak about the crops and the prospects of a good harvest.

"There is no more delightful study, Tom," he

said, "for young or old than nature, and no more delightful book to read. Some are born naturalists just as others are born musicians; but even musical taste and that for natural history can be acquired by the young. It is animal nature that appeals most to youth, and they should be encouraged to study that first; not by catching and killing things, but watching the work and habits of life of the spiders, ants, earwigs, beetles, centipedes, etc. If a father wants to encourage his boy or girl in the pursuit of the most charming science in the world, let him place down on a quiet part of the lawn a flat, thick plank about nine inches wide and three feet long. When it has lain for weeks so that it has half sunk into the ground and the grass is gone from under, it is time to lift it gently. Lo! what a study you will find beneath. Perhaps a score of different natural families may be found living peacefully there. The boy or girl may lift it day after day, and study the ways and manners of the creatures beneath. A child should receive a reward for every little essay he writes about the plank-dwellers. Moreover, thereby there is at least one moral taught concerning the virtue of peace, for all these creatures live in amity. If it isn't the lion lying down with the lamb, it is the huge, yellow-brown centipede cheek by jowl with a beautiful white-striped burying beetle, or allowing even a little regiment of ants to crawl unmolested over him. Of course the study of natural history has no end. It is supposed that of beetles alone

there are about twenty million species in the world. I can't tell how long ago it may be since this world cooled down sufficiently, to permit of the creation of animal life. I believe about two hundred millions of years. However, creation is going on still, and new species of lower animal life being evolved every day. Why, one can even help the process of evolution in lower life, and so creation will continue till this earth becomes a cold, airless moon to the sun, and the sun an inhabited world, revolving round some huge sun now trillions of miles away. Food for thought in this, I think!"

Well, then, Laurie was a student of the nature that is found under stones,—of beetles and all kinds of insects,—and often when Ernest and he were fishing he would stop to lift the decayed branch of a tree, that had been lying for long weeks on the bank, and preach his friend a real pretty sermon on the beautiful creepie-creepies that were found beneath. Ernest and Laurie always, after having a good few hours' fishing, started Leebie off to the cave with some of the catch to prepare supper, and indeed the little maid—thanks to her mother's tuition—was quite an adept at cooking. Then the boys would undress and leap into the stream, accompanied by the dogs, of course, to enjoy a good swim. A long one, too; for his father told Laurie that swimming was a fine thing to bring up the muscles of the chest, and even of the limbs, and that the bathing, moreover, kept open the pores of the skin.

Ernest opened his eyes very wide indeed, when told that even insects that we consider almost loathsome are most particular as to personal cleanliness.

And so they are, reader. Who has not watched the carefulness and frequency with which the household fly removes the dust from off his cheeks and down his legs, and how constantly he gives his wings a polish. Other insects do the same. In drowsily hot days in summer, even butterflies wade into ponds to cool their limbs and bodies, and we may be well sure that the gloss and glitter on the backs or elytra of our garden beetles is not kept up without a good deal of trouble and polishing, not necessarily done by their short legs. I watched, with much interest, the other evening an earwig on the outside of a pane of glass. The lamplight shone full upon him, and for half an hour he scrubbed himself all over. Going out to a party, perhaps.

But Laurie's studies were not all by the river's bank, in the woods, or on the moorland. No, for his father's farm and gardens were well treed, and the old-fashioned house had eaves, under which the martins built. The doings of some of these birds puzzled our young hero not a little.

At a risk of wearying those of my readers who love not nature, I must mention a curious affair that happened this very autumn in which I introduce my young folks. Laurie, then, on looking out of his bedroom window one morning, was surprised to find that two martins had begun to build under the eaves.

It is true the sun shone very brightly, and that there was every prospect of summer continuing. But it would be far into October before the young, if any should be produced, could be ready to fly. Were these martins mad, or like many newly married couples, only just a trifle foolish? The building got on very slowly. There seemed a hitch somewhere. They built a portion of one nest, then commenced another six inches from the first. The foundations of both nests were about four inches square, projecting like small balconies. But at six o'clock in the morning of the 31st of August, a very curious thing happened. A cluster of martins came to inspect the nests. There could not have been less than thirty of them, all old birds. The excitement was intense as they flew twittering to and fro. Half a dozen at least clung to the wall close to the nests, while others, one after another, sat on them, as if trying their stability and comfort. It really seemed just then that those birds were holding a kind of court-martial upon the young couple, and remonstrating with them on the extreme folly of commencing house-keeping at a season so advanced, winter itself but a measurable distance ahead, and the telegraph wires already black with swallows preparing for the great exodus south and away to warmer climes. But the mystery was explained at last. For as soon as the inspection was ended, the flock of martins disappeared as speedily as it had come, and nothing more occurred, nor did a bird go near the nest until six o'clock on

the evening of September 1, when precisely the same sort of thing occurred, lasting only a very few minutes, however. Next morning, on looking out, behold, upon one of the little clay shelves sat a poor little young swallow. Sick or ill it evidently was, and sadly out of moult, but just strong enough to try to preen its feathers. And every night for a whole week there came an old swallow with this ailing young one, and both would seat themselves on a shelf of clay. Then in a short time the mother would fly away, and in the morning, on looking out, my little bird was there. But it seemed to get stronger every day, and then it went away and came no more. There is no bird more fond or careful of its young than the swallow or martin, but the facts stated show a wisdom in these charming birds that is little short of human.

It will do no harm to mention here, what happened to those hospital shelves on which the martins nursed the sick one. The story is instructive and shows that even birds study economy.

Well, when next spring the martins came back, they turned the shelves into nests, making the holes, singularly enough, in the west side. But the insolent sparrows came and bored holes in the east side, cleared the martins out, and began lining the nest for their own use. And now the fun began; for those martins returned with half a dozen others, and after a fierce fight gained possession of the nests once more, and all was well. But there was no claying up.

SOMETHING ABOUT WASPS

Only a few notes on these interesting creatures, and they have a bearing on natural history of the pleasant order. It was the good old Dr. Watts, I think, who remarked in one of those poems of his, which I had to learn by heart when a little boy, by way of encouraging me to make the most of life, — which I didn't, —

“How doth the little busy bee
Improve each shining hour,
And gather honey all the day
From every opening flower?”

If the dear old doctor were with me in my caravan (The Wanderer) at this moment, he would be able to answer the question himself.

The little busy bee is singing right merrily at this moment in my house upon wheels. He has come for the day, if he meets with no accident, and has brought most of his hive mates. They purpose having a good time of it. Well, wasps are interesting creatures, especially when they have curled up in death. Wasps are by no means difficult to slay if you take the right plan with them. While the little imp is dancing right merrily up and down the window pane, he will readily succumb to a poke of your forefinger. But beware you don't give him time to turn his tail on you, else red-hot needles won't be in it with what you'll have to grin and bear. A bright and clever wee lancer is the giddy, gaudy wasp. I think he is at his best on a lovely morning in early

autumn, when you have fruit in your caravan. I speak from experience of him, and from close intimacy with him. I have studied him more than once this summer, with tears of agony in my eyes. Not a fortnight ago I was stung inside the mouth while asleep. I used to believe that I always slept with my mouth shut. I'm not quite of the same opinion now. But what did the little imp of brimstone want inside my lip anyhow? Perhaps he mistook it for a ripe tomato. Howbeit, I awoke with a start, thinking the ship was on fire and no water handy. Of course, I couldn't find the carbonate of ammonia, hence my subsequent sorrow. For days I had a lip as large as any old mare's. I am glad to say I soon recovered health and condition, and am now as good looking as ever. But with wasps on the war-path, an accident may happen at any time. Wasps are fond of sweets and fruit, which they carry away in armfuls. They also relish boiled liver, and may be seen dining with my St. Bernard dog Lassie any day. Lassie doesn't love them, and at present spends half her spare time snapping at them. When I warn her of the danger, she looks up wonderingly and inquiringly. Why should I preserve the lives of wasps? she is thinking, and I feel sorry I cannot explain to her that she hasn't caught my meaning quite. Dogs and wasps are invariably at daggers drawn, but it is the wasp that carries the dagger. Daresay wasps were made for some purpose, but I haven't found out yet just what this purpose is. There is one instinct

they possess in common with cats and carrier pigeons ; namely, the homing. I wish they would make more use of it. There is even one good thing to be said of them, however ; they keep early hours. A blue-bottle will sit up all night if you do, but a wasp retires. Only if you have killed a wasp, don't give it to a baby to play with, unless it is your neighbour's. The wasp stings *post mortem*. And that's the worst of all.

Writing about wasps may seem silly to some. But on such a day as this, in such a quiet pitch, — a field of short red clover, on the bonny banks o' Dee, — with the soft, delicious sunshine everywhere, and a breeze to cool and brace ; with the grand old hills beyond, hills that literally carry the splendid pine tree woods up into the clouds with them, who could or would write on matters dry as dust ? See, yonder, across my field the butterflies, crimson and white, go floating and flying, hardly caring whither the west wind wafts them. Heedlessly though each one of them may seem to fly, is he not really obeying the dictates of a kind philosophy, the possession of which you and I might well envy him ? He appears to have reached the Nirvana of the Buddhists, and the calm, happy composure of that state — the utter contentment. That butterfly may enjoy the sunlight and the breeze, the snowy whiteness of the driving clouds, the blueness of the sky, both may give him pleasure as he sips his nectar from the choicest wild flowers, or nods half asleep on the perfumed thistle. It

would be telling many of us who toil and moil through life, and worry far too much, if, now and then, we could adopt the philosophy of that gaudily painted flutterer, and give ourselves to butterfly-mindedness. To-day, in this sweet meadow, all among the bees, so to speak, I do not feel inclined for work and study of a heavy kind, and isn't this just nature calling out for a little rest—a little lazying? Depend upon it, a little lazying, boys, now and then, never did a hard-working man or woman aught else save good. But on the other hand, as life is all made up of changes, we must put our shoulder to the wheel when duty calls. Let us feel happy in being able to do so, happy in our strength; and when tired, and the holiday still on ahead, we can remember the fact that tough, honest work will never kill; idleness, if indulged in too much, claims its victims every day.

CHAPTER IV

LAURIE AND LEEBIE MADE PRISONERS

Ah, happy hills! Ah, pleasing shades!
Ah, fields beloved in vain!
Where once my careless childhood strayed,
A stranger yet to pain.

GOBLIN CAVE, which Laurie and Leebie had made their prairie home, was so named because the country folks believed it to be haunted by creatures belonging to a far worse world than ours. It had been, originally, a smugglers' den, if not, indeed, a haunt of robbers, to which they might retire, in the good old times, to count out and share their ill-gotten gains after despoiling the house of some wealthy squire not a hundred miles away. But until the children took to it, the cave had been deserted for many and many a long year.

It was old Tom Herbert who first gave it a bad name. Tom was taking a near cut across the moor one Saturday night, after spending hours with boon companions in a village some miles distant. There is a probability that the old fellow had imbibed more than was really good for him. He was positive enough, however, that as he neared the cave he heard the sound of mirth and merriment, and that

a strange, little, deformed old man, with a face like a withered potato and a light in his skinny hand, met him, and bowed till his bulbous nose almost touched the heath.

"My dear Tom Herbert," the goblin said, speaking with a strong Irish accent, "and is it indade your beautiful self that I'm after seeing right fore-ninst me?"

"It's nobody else," said Tom, "and worse luck, too."

"Ach! but, Tom, my darlint, it's into the cave you'll be coming to rest ye."

"No, no, no," cried Tom; "my wife would—"

"And wet your whistle, Tom. Sure it's cowl'd and dark that the night is, and when you've wet your whistle, Tom, troth I'll light ye safely o'er the moor meself."

Well, Tom Herbert was always willing to wet his whistle, and so he followed the goblin into the cave. This was brilliantly lighted up, and scores of the strangest and most uncouth looking beings he had ever seen were sitting, lolling, or squatting round the rocky walls. Some were even standing on their heads; some had horns; all had tails; and all were frightfully ugly. But they grinned, and grimaced, and jibbered, and leered, and laughed till poor Tom began to think he had got into very bad company indeed. He was somewhat comforted, however, when Goblin No. 1 placed a huge bottle and glass before him and bade him drink and be merry.

Tom needed no second bidding. The wine was delicious though fiery, but the curious thing was this: the more Tom drank, the thirstier he grew. And now, as the fun was getting fast and furious, Tom staggered to his feet, and happy indeed was he when he found himself once more on the moor, with Goblin No. 1 walking in front with a pale blue, bobbing light.

Now there were on the moor, and are still, many deep, brown, stagnant pools, and poor Tom had not proceeded a hundred yards, before souse into one of these he fell, head first.

The banks all around were slippery, black, and peaty, and he could not get out; so he just swam round and round among the swarms of huge, alligator-shaped tritons and awful, crawling, slimy things in which the pool abounded.

He shrieked for help.

None came, however; but at least fifty horrible goblins from the cave, each with a bobbing light, had joined hands and were dancing and jibbering round the pool.

It was a terrible sight, and a terrible predicament to be in.

"Help! Help! Save me! Save me!" poor Tom Herbert shrieked louder than ever. Then, strangely enough, he awoke in bed.

Still, there were his clothes which his wife had hung around the fire, and these proved that Tom had really been in the brown pool on the moor.

His neighbours all believed his fearsome story, too, and after this, any one who had occasion to cross that moor after nightfall gave the cave a very wide berth indeed.

But lights were frequently seen near it, so it is no wonder the place got so bad a name.

* * * * *

As soon as the youngsters, on the day of the grand horse and donkey race, had dismissed their steeds and entered the cave, Laurie and the two dogs threw themselves on the couch of bracken, while Leebie busied herself laying a fire.

I have already said there was a chimney in the cave; only a hole, but the draught was good, and it was under this that Leebie laid the fire, ready to light when the time came. The hearth had a rude kind of crane above it, with a chain and a hook depending therefrom, and on the latter either pot or pan could be hung.

The furniture in this strange dwelling was simple enough. Besides the couch of bracken, there were several stools, and these the boy had made himself. There was also a rude sort of a cupboard with plenty of dishes and cooking utensils, as well as stores of sugar, tea, and coffee. Then there was a very nice table. What more could any half-wild children want, I wonder?

There were, of course, no pictures on the rough, rocky walls, and articles of virtue were conspicuous simply by their non-existence. Nevertheless, there

was plenty of fishing-tackle, and no less than three fishing-baskets.

And a gun!

This gun, or fowling-piece, was greatly revered by Laurie. The plain, or moorland, was a kind of no-man's-land, and the boy could shoot rabbits over it at any time.

The gun had been given him by an uncle, but once it had led him into trouble.

As this trouble, however, had resulted in his becoming acquainted with Ernest Elliot, he never regretted it.

I shall tell you how it happened.

The east side of the moor or plain ended in a beautiful wood of oak and sycamore, intermingled with many a dark-plumed pine tree. There was far less undergrowth here than one usually finds in English woods and forests, so that walking beneath the trees was comparatively easy.

This wood was not on a level, but clothed the sides of a dingle or dell, adown the centre of which roared or ran a splendid stream, almost big enough to be called a river.

In the season there was no doubt plenty of game to be found in the wood, but as there were many warnings pasted up on boards informing whomsoever it might concern that trespassers would be "prosecuted with the utmost rigour of the law," the children gave the wood, and the stream also, a wide berth.

But one beautiful day, in early summer, about four months before the date on which our tale commences, Laurie and Leebie, intent on their studies of the beautiful in nature, had wandered right away to the other end of the moor. Sir Duncan and Towsie were with them of course, but the pony and his friend Neddy were browsing near the cave.

The children had been very happy during their ramble, pausing often to gaze skywards and listen to bird-music in the clouds, for their prairie was in reality a land of larks.

But when they came near to the woodland, the character of the bird-music suddenly changed. It was a wild medley now, but a very beautiful one. The song of the thrush, the melodious fluting of the blackbird, the bold lilting of the madcap chaffinch, and the sweet voices of linnets and warblers, to say nothing of the low purring of the turtle-dove and mournful croodle of the wood-pigeon.

"Oh, isn't it lovely, Laurie!" cried Leebie, clapping her hands with joy. "Do come into the wood just a little way and sit down."

"No, Leebie, no. We—"

How his sentence would have ended, I cannot tell; for just at that moment, the daft wee terrier suddenly came to the conclusion that he scented a rabbit down yonder somewhere. He appealed to Towsie, and Towsie seemed to wink with his wall eye. Then off they both darted, and were speedily out of sight.

Not out of hearing, however, and from their

anxious, sharp, ringing barks, Laurie rightly judged that they were in chase.

Some one else was of the same opinion, and that was Squire Elliot's corduroyed keeper.

Laurie stood not on ceremony now, but rushed into the wood trying to recall the dogs.

It was fully half an hour before the latter returned, Towsie carrying a rabbit, Currie trotting by his side and looking very proud indeed.

And behind them, at some distance, appeared the keeper, to the infinite terror of poor Leebie. He was an ugly, rough-looking, poek-marked man, with an evil eye in his head. No, he had not two, for years ago one had been shot out by a poacher.

Why Laurie had brought his gun with him that day, he himself could never tell. It was certainly with no intention of spilling the blood of even a polecat.

"Well, lad, I've caught thee nicely," shouted the keeper. "Noo, I'll tell thee wot I'm goin' to do. I'm goin' to shoot that dog!"

With a little scream, Leebie ran forward and threw her arms about Towsie's neck. She knelt on the ground and Currie cuddled up beside her.

Hardly accountable for his action, Laurie lowered his gun and pointed it at the fellow's head. It was a bold act, but a very foolish one.

"Dare to shoot a dog of mine," he cried, "and I'll shoot out your other ugly eye."

The keeper was cowed evidently.

"Aw — aw — I didn't mean to shoot the dawg," he said, "but ye've been a-trespassin' and a-poachin'. Ye'll all have to come along to t' squire's 'ouse."

"That we shall right willingly."

Towsie permitted Laurie to take the rabbit, but when he handed it to the keeper the dog sprang at once on the fellow and speedily repossessed himself of the bunny. So the boy slung it over his shoulder, and the march commenced.

Far down the stream stood the Grange, and Leebie was quite tired before they reached the beautiful mansion.

The keeper would have gone round to the back with his prisoners, but the squire himself and a tall manly boy about Laurie's age — Ernest, in fact — were on the rose lawn.

A red-faced, jolly-looking man was the squire.

"What, ho! there, Brown," he shouted; "whom have you got? Bring them this way."

"Daring poachers, sir," said Brown, touching his hat.

The squire was evidently impressed with the innocent young beauty of Leebie. He patted her bonnie hair and told her not to be afraid.

"If we are going to be thrown into a dungeon," said Laurie, "I'd like to give my dogs a drink of water first."

Squire Elliot laughed such a hearty ringing laugh, that Laurie was obliged to join in.

"Go and bring water for these dogs, Brown," cried

the squire. "And look quick about it. Come in, children," he added, taking Leebie's hand, "and tell me all about it."

They entered the drawing-room through the French window, but the kindly squire would not let Laurie commence his story, until he and his sister and even the dogs had partaken of refreshments. Then Laurie did tell him and Ernest all; all about the moor and their cave, their studies and sports, and their dear father and mother and the farm at home.

The squire, and his wife also, were very much amused and interested, and it ended thus: they were invited to tea for next day, Laurie's fishing-basket was filled with bananas, — fruit that neither he nor his sister had ever seen before, — and Ernest himself was sent to convoy them safe through the woods.

He went all the way to their wondrous cave with them, and marvelled much at their household arrangements.

A very frank open-faced lad was Ernest, with blue eyes and fair short-cut hair. His manners and speech were just as frank as was his face, and he did not hesitate for a moment to tell Leebie how clever he thought her, and how pretty!

"Oh," returned the child-woman, blushing a little, but with pleasure, not shyness. "I'm not nearly so pretty as you. Then you talk so nicely!"

"Well, we had better be sweethearts, I suppose."

"Oh, I don't know what that is, you know; but you'll come and see us, won't you?"

"Yes, often, often!"

"And I'm sure the dogs will like you?"

"Yes."

"And Bobbie and Neddy, too?"

"I hope so."

"Have you any sisters and brothers?"

"Ye-es. Three of each."

"But they can't be so nice as you?"

"Oh, much, much nicer, because they are all big, Miss Lea."

"You might just call me Leebie. Everybody does."

"Yes, if you call me Ernie. Every'ody does."

This compact was soon made.

But Ernest Elliot was really a romantic sort of a boy, and always building castles in the air, founded on what he meant to do when he grew a man.

He was the younger son. Moreover, he had an uncle who was an officer in Her Majesty's Royal Navy, and who used to tell him the most thrilling stories of adventure, and of life in far-off lands; so Ernest had quite made up his mind to travel somewhere abroad when bigger and stronger.

He told Laurie and Leebie this, and both said that they should dearly love to share his adventures.

"But that," sighed Laurie, "can never, never be!"

How little do we know what Fate may have in store for us!

Well, the acquaintanceship made that day soon became cemented into a friendship that was almost

brotherly, and nearly every day on which Laurie and Leebie went to the boundless prairie, Ernie met them, and fine fun they had, I do assure you, boys. Fishing, I think, is the most calmative and delightful sport any one can engage in. Of course one cannot help being a little sorry for the fish hauled out, and for this reason I never leave either a trout or salmon to pine and die by degrees. I kill it at once.

Well, on this very autumn day the children were awaiting Ernest's arrival.

But a whole hour passed away; then two.

Laurie had been reading or talking to his sister most of this time, but now he closed the book wearily.

Leebie was weary too.

"Heigh-ho!" she sighed, "I do wonder if he will come at all to-day."

"I feel certain he won't. And now I have something to propose."

"Yes, Laurie."

"Well, we shall take our fishing-tackle, mount our fiery steeds, and ride off to the river to catch our dinner, then ride home and cook it."

This programme was carried out to the very letter.

And the fish were hungry that day. And so, too, was Laurie; therefore he did not stay to make a very big basket, and in two hours from the time they started they were back once more at the cave and Bobbie and Neddy were again turned loose.

What a delightful aroma pervaded the cave, as

Leebie fried those fish. She knew how much salt to sprinkle over them, and the exact quantity of pepper.

Laurie had thrown himself on the couch again, with a dog at each side of him, and being just pleasantly tired, it is no wonder he fell asleep. So soundly did he slumber, indeed, that his sister had to shake him over and over again before he opened his bewildered eyes.

And both children and dogs did more than justice to the dinner; for the beautiful crimson-spotted trout were done to a turn, the bread and butter were delicious, and Leebie had gone so far as to roast potatoes in the hot ashes. And really, those potatoes seemed to have burst their sides, laughing at the way they had been treated.

But as they sat there talking and eating, with Currie and Towsie between them, little did they know that they would soon have an adventure—a strange, if not, indeed, a terrifying one. It is well we do not always know what is before us.

CHAPTER V

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

"Close by a wild hobgoblin moor
And near a lonesome wood
Where black bats flit and owlets scream,
The dreary hamlet stood." — ANON.

THE short November day had worn to a close, and the sun had set behind wooded hills in the far southwest, leaving a bank of fiery-looking clouds that boded a dark, and probably a stormy night.

Indeed, the sky was already overcast, and a low wind was beginning to moan across the moorland.

Nothing, however, could terrify these children of the wilds, for they knew their way home, and even if they should go astray, was Towsie not by their side? Yes, and *his* instinct before now had proved far more useful than even their reason.

"Reason raise o'er instinct if you can;
In this 'tis God directs, in that 'tis man."

But now Laurie and Leebie started for their distant home, riding, as usual, on Bobbie and Ned, with the two dogs wheeling around them in wide circles, and barking with delight.

They were quite at the other end of the moor before Laurie made a disagreeable discovery.

"Oh, Leebie," he cried, "how very foolish of me! Why, I've forgotten to bring my fishing-basket and those lovely trout we saved for mother. Will you stay here till I ride back?"

"No, I should be afraid; I'll go, too."

Well, it was almost quite dark before they got once more started, on their return.

"I'll tell you what we shall do to-night, Leebie," said Laurie.

"Yes?"

"We shall take the short cut."

"By the haunted house?"

"I don't like it, Laurie," she added, "but of course I won't be afraid, with you and Towsie and Currie and Bob beside me."

What they called "the haunted house" was a two-storied cottage with dark, blinking windows, that stood near to a gloomy-looking little wood, or copse, with no other place near. An old miser used to live here all by himself with merely the companionship of a white pony that, like himself, was little more than skin and bone. He tilled a bit of a croft which, since his demise, had gone all to ruin, and was overgrown now with nettles and thistles.

The old man had died as he had lived,—all, all alone; and it was nearly a fortnight afterwards that he was found, lying frozen hard—for it was midwinter—beside his hearth. And, sad to relate,

the white pony had perished of cold and hunger in its stall. The poor animal had even eaten part of the woodwork near it.

No one would take the house and croft after that, so it had been permitted to fall into decay.

It looked very gloomy to-night as the children approached it, and indeed I know nothing much more dismal to behold than an empty house in a place like this. The windows were curtainless and black. Like ugly leering eyes they were, and the very cottage itself seemed to nod, as the wind moaned through the tall trees behind it.

People did say that on many a dark night the old miser used to be seen, lantern in hand and nightcap on head, roaming around the house or out on the moor leading that skeleton white pony by the forelock.

But neither of the children believed this. Something — they could not tell what — appeared to lure them closer to the house, to-night, and they stopped to gaze in through one of the windows, as if in a spirit of fascination.

Suddenly, to their terror and amazement, a door in the room opened, and a tall figure, holding a candle, entered, and approached the fireplace. They could not see his face very well, but they noticed that his clothes were curiously fashioned, and light in colour. Moreover, they were covered all over with dark markings resembling arrow-heads.

But now Towsie gave vent to a sort of startled

bark, and suddenly the light went out, and they saw no more.

Neddy had been set free, but Bob with Leebie on his back now started off in fine style for home. He, too, had been frightened.

And Laurie trotted alongside, all the way to their own door.

Glad, indeed, were they when they got inside, for here was a cosy fire. Daddy was in his arm-chair, smoking and reading, the big cat was nodding half asleep on a footstool, and supper was ready. They told their strange story.

They had seen the ghost!

But Farmer Lea only laughed.

"That was no ghost, my children," he said, "but some poor escaped convict in hiding, and no doubt we shall soon hear of his capture."

But the adventure did not end quite here.

For after school hours next day, Laurie and Leebie once more set out for the moor.

The day was fine after the storm, and the sky was clear and blue.

They were anxious to see Ernest, but they took the longest road. They had seen more than enough of the haunted house.

It was well on in the afternoon before they neared the cave, and lo! yonder was Ernest Elliot himself coming to meet them, riding at the gallop on Neddy.

Neddy and he seemed both in fine form, and the former must needs stop so suddenly short that Ernest

fell off, but quickly gathered himself up, laughing. Neddy was laughing too. That was what he had stopped for; and when Neddy laughed as he did now, with a "Haw-hee! haw-hee!" the sound was reëchoed back from the very clouds — apparently.

"Couldn't get away yesterday, Leebie," said Ernest. "Uncle came home from sea!"

"And, oh, Ernie," cried Leebie, "we had such a terrible fright going home!"

"Yes," added Laurie, "a real wild adventure!"

"Well, don't tell me now. It will be so much nicer to hear it after tea and supper."

Ernie had been at the cave a whole hour. He had laid and lit the fire; by this fire stood a very long-legged stew-pan, and the kettle was singing as it dangled from the crane.

It was a lovely supper, and all did justice to it, including the dogs, of course.

Then they heaped more wood and peats on the fire, and sat cosily round it.

"And father says it was an escaped convict," said Laurie, as he concluded the relation of his strange adventure.

"Poor fellow!" said Ernest, sympathisingly. "I wonder what he has done, and how he escaped. Do you know, Laurie, I hope he will get clear away."

Then Ernie began to tell his friends all about his sailor uncle, and *his* wild adventures.

So the time flew very quickly on indeed.

But this young fellow had a violin on which he

could play indifferently well. He had brought it to the cave for Laurie and Leebie's delectation, both being very fond of sweet music, and it was kept in the cupboard.

It was quite dusk when he began to play, but the firelight threw a ruddy glare across the cave, and everything else was forgotten as the children listened to the sweet sad strains of the violin.

Suddenly both dogs sprang up from the hearth and rushed barking towards the mouth of the cave; and on looking up all were startled, and Leebie sadly terrified, to see standing there the very figure they had seen in the haunted house.

"Don't be alarmed, children," the man hastened to say; "I am far too weak and ill to do any one any harm, even if I had the will. Which, Heaven knows, I have not."

No one answered, and he continued, —

"Just for a moment, I saw last night a face at the window of the old house I have been hidden in for weeks. It was that sweet girl's."

"You are an escaped convict," said Ernest; "we ought to give you up."

"Stay, young sir; stay till you have heard my story. It is true, I have escaped, but oh, children! I am an innocent and badly treated man. The house in which I have been hiding is no longer safe for me. The warders are on my track, and a place like that is the first they would examine. May I beg shelter for the night, and a morsel of food?"

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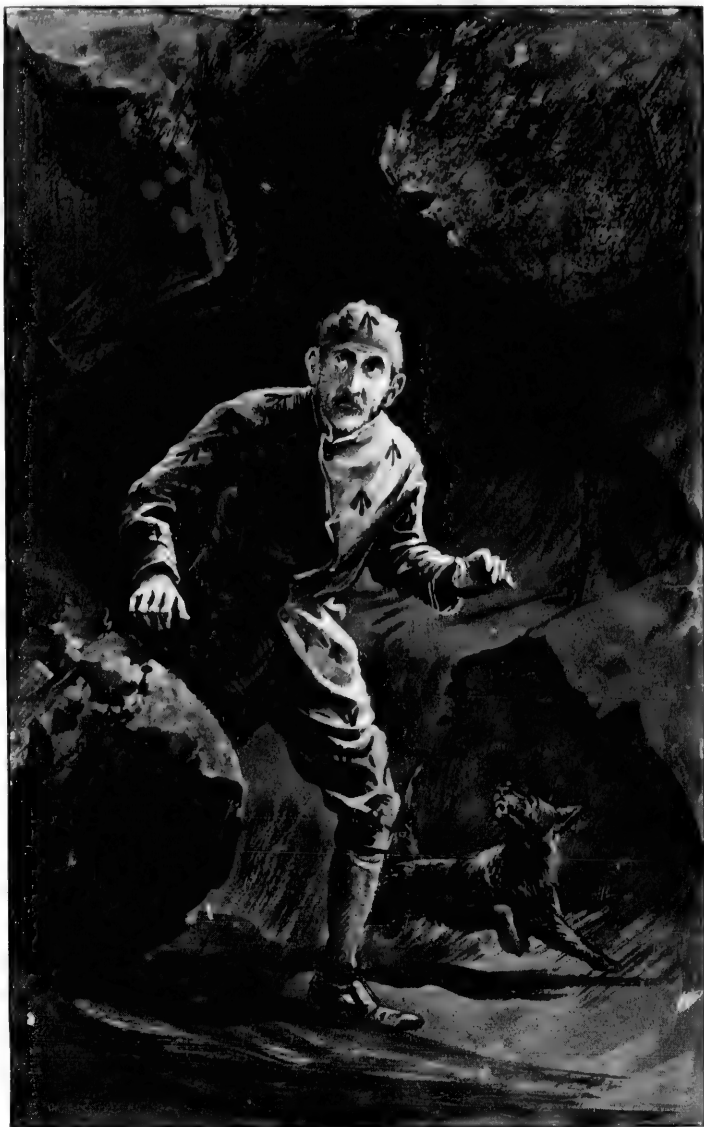
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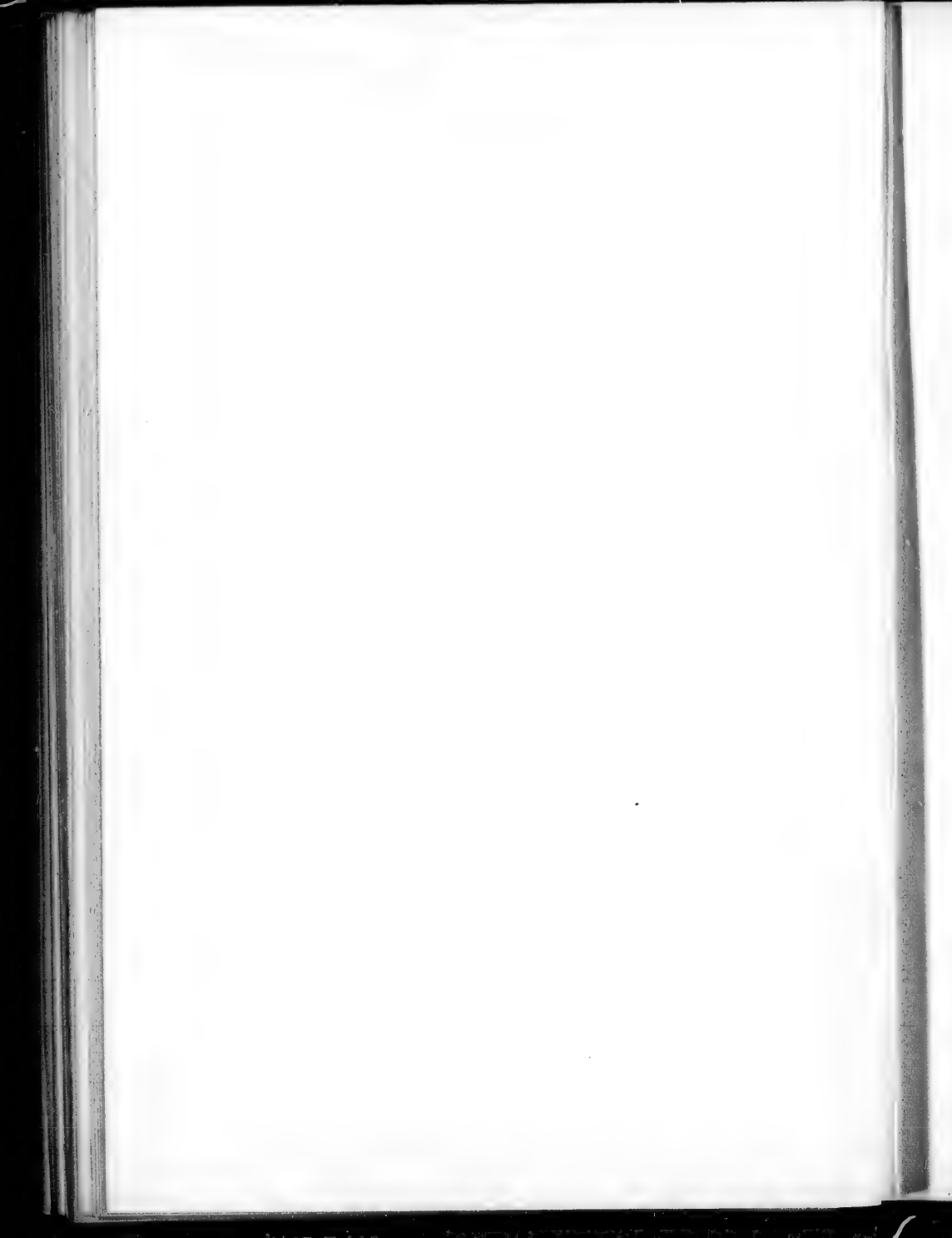
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THE VERY FIGURE THEY HAD SEEN IN THE HAUNTED HOUSE.



"If you say you are innocent," said Ernest Elliot, "we will try to believe you, and you really have not the looks of a malefactor."

"Oh no," cried Leebie.

Nor had he. Despite his short cropped hair and beard, both black, his looks were prepossessing. Young he was, and with singularly dark blue eyes, that at present were unspeakably sad.

"Come closer to the fire, and sit down," said Laurie; "you must be cold."

The convict did as he was told, seating himself on an old tree root.

Towsie approached him quietly and licked his hand, and even Currie did not now resent the intrusion.

The friendliness of the dogs raised him very much in the estimation of the boys; for well they knew, just as you and I know, reader, that a dog is a better judge of character than even a man.

The children were very glad, indeed, that there was enough food in the cave to make the man a comfortable supper, after which he appeared far more cheerful.

"And now," said Ernest, "we would hear your story. Though it is dark inside the cave, it will be light enough for a whole hour yet on the moor. We shall see to get home."

"But may I rest me here to-night, boys?"

"Most certainly."

"And you will not give me away?"

"If by that you mean inform on you," said Ernie,

"both I and my friends here promise most faithfully to try to save you, rather than to give you away."

"Oh, thanks! a thousand thanks!" cried the poor convict. "Undoubtedly the warders will be at the old house to-morrow, and I have purposely left evidence that I have been there. They will then, I think, go on. If not, and if they seize me here, surely the bitterness of Fate can have nothing worse in store for me."

"But come, children, I sadden you, I fear. Give me your violin for a minute, lad. I used to play, two years ago, before my incarceration. Perhaps my fingers have not yet lost all their cunning."

Indeed they had not, and our young heroes sat enthralled as the convict played. That violin seemed possessed of spirit-life in his hands; it was a being from a better world. But alas! even his quick and merry pieces had an air of such sadness about them, that Ernest's eyes were filled with tears.

"What would I not give," cried the boy, as the convict handed him back the fiddle, "to be able to play like you! But now, sir, tell us your story."

He spoke even with deference; for convict though this man was, he was likewise a master.

"I will, boys, I will, and innocent though you are, you may learn a lesson therefrom. Yet goodness forbid that I should even seem to preach. I shall but state facts in the simplest way I can."

CHAPTER VI

THE CONVICT'S TERRIBLE STORY

"He cometh unto you with a tale which can hold children from play, and old men from the chimney corner."—SIR PHILIP SIDNEY.

"FOR two years back then," he began, "while slaving in the stone quarries of P——, I have been known but by a number. I have had no name. Yet it does not seem so very long ago since I was one of the happiest and best respected young fellows in the city of C——. And the name that the law has filched from me was Wilson Webb. Boys, if I escape, I mean with God's help to restore that name. I might take another, but I am innocent, and never shall. I shall try to work my passage to a foreign land, but I will still be Wilson Webb.

"I cannot remember either my father or mother. In fact, the former died before my birth, and, broken-hearted, my mother did not live a year after. But it is, perhaps, as well they did not survive to see their son in the dock, and condemned to penal servitude.

"My father had many good friends; one of these adopted and reared me. I believe both he and his wife were very fond of me. But alas! both died of

fever within a fortnight of each other, and I was once more thrown penniless, or nearly so, on the world.

"But my education had been good, and I was shortly taken into the office of a wealthy city merchant, who had known my mother.

"There were two other clerks besides myself, and the white-haired old gentleman was very kind to us all and trusted us implicitly. Young though I was, I have often been sent to the bank to cash cheques many hundreds of pounds in value. So, too, was Robson.

"Robson and I, you must know, lived in the same apartments, just one cosy bedroom and a sitting-room; but our old landlady was exceedingly good to us, so that I was as happy as a summer's day is long.

"Peters, the other clerk, and I were very great friends. Indeed, I think we loved each other more than many brothers do. But he was a year or two younger, and lived with his parents. He had a very beautiful sister, and I was a frequent visitor at the house of an evening, always taking my violin with me.

"You, boys, are too young to know anything about love, but I loved my friend's sister more, I used to think, than life itself. It was with my fiddle I wooed her, lads, and often and often as I played have I seen the tears streaming down her sweet face. Heigh-ho! I wonder where Madeleine is now!

"But now let me tell you a little more about Rob-

son. For a year or so while living together, he seemed all that any one could wish. But after this he took to staying out later at night than I liked, and I knew that much of his time was spent at a hotel bar, a good deal frequented by so-called sporting characters.

"I must add, however, that I never saw Robson the worse for accursed drink. But his talk was all too frequently of the turf. He would often tell me that he had 'spotted a winner,' or that he had received 'a straight tip,' and there were rare occasions when he seemed as full of joy and gladness as if some one had just left him a fortune.

"Right well do I remember his coming home one evening more joyful than usual.

"'Wilson,' he said, 'I wonder you don't have a bet on now and then. There now, we are pals, and so I don't mind putting you up to a good thing at any time.'

"'I don't seem to care for such things,' I said; 'for old hands have told me that what you win one day, you lose another, and more besides.'

"'Nonsense, Wilson, nonsense. Now just look here. I'm going to make your eyes twinkle with envy and surprise.'

"Then he hauled forth handful after handful of gold, and threw it carelessly down on the table.

"'Count it, Webb, count it, and if you want a bit, you can have it.'

"I counted the money, which amounted to no less than sixty pounds.

"I confess that I did feel a little envious. 'What good,' I could not help thinking, 'was there in slaving away at the drudgery of an office desk if money could be so easily made by spotting a winner, as Robson called it?'"

"I had more than half a mind to try to spot a winner myself.

"Robson stood there with his hands in his pockets, his head a little to one side, and a smile on his sinister face—he was very far indeed from being prepossessing—gazing down at the bright yellow pile.

"'Look here, Webb,' he said, 'I'm going to ask for a fortnight's leave, and I know the old man will grant it. I shall run up to town, and before I come back that sixty pounds will be six hundred pounds at least. Then I'll cut the office and turn a book-maker. Now can I put a "sou" on for you?'"

"Then I foolishly enough gave him the last piece of gold I had in the world.

"My horse lost, and I tempted the turf no more.

"Yet I did expect Robson to come back with plenty of money.

"Alas! he not only returned penniless, but minus even his watch.

"'Down on my luck. Horrid!' he said, throwing himself into the easy-chair, with his legs extended in front of him, and his hat resting on the bridge of his nose.

"'Never mind, Webb, better times will come. You'll see.'

"But things seemed to go from bad to worse with my companion, and I noticed more than once that, when he returned late, he was evidently not sober. Yet he was always fresh enough in the morning, and our kind old employer knew nothing about his doings.

"Christmas time came round, and I myself was out nearly every evening, my violin being in great repute. But I knew that Robson stayed more in the house now, and I hoped for his reformation.

"But early in the new year came the awful denouement.

"I had been out on a business message at the other end of the city, and, when returning, met Robson near to the bank.

"‘Ah! Webb,’ he cried; ‘glad I met you. I’ve to meet a fellow in this hotel, but won’t be long. Just toddle into the bank, will you, and cash this cheque for the firm? All gold if you can carry it, except twenty in five-pound notes.’

"I willingly obeyed.

"The cheque was for £420.

"Robson was in the street, about fifty yards from the bank, and I handed him the bag, and then hurried home to dinner.

"But I cannot describe to you the horror and the terror I felt on being awakened one morning about a fortnight after, and finding two burly policemen and a man in plain clothes standing by the foot of the bed.

"'You're our prisoner,' said the latter. 'Dress yourself quietly, and come along.'

"'But what does it mean?' I cried, as soon as I could speak. 'Of what am I accused?'

"'Know no more than you do,' said the detective. 'Mebbe not so much, young fellow. Anyhow, I've got to act upon my warrant; so look smart.'

"When arraigned later on upon a charge of forgery, my anguish and perturbation of mind must have been mistaken for guilt. Anyhow, I was remanded, bail being refused, and after a time, oh, such a weary, weary time! I was brought up for trial.

"The cheque that Robson had given me to cash had been a forged one. I told all the truth, and nothing but the truth.

"I was not believed.

"'Had I forged that cheque,' I cried in agony, 'surely, I would not have taken it myself to the bank.'

"'Silence, young man,' said the judge, sternly.

"Even Robson appeared as a witness against me, swearing he had found morsels of paper by the fire-place of a morning, with our employer's signature thereon. Also that I was often up late in the sitting-room, writing he knew not what.

But the most terrible evidence against me — evidence that was deemed conclusive — was the fact that in my desk was found not only a sheet of paper written all over with imitations of the firm's signature, but two of the bank-notes the cashier had paid me when he gave me the gold.

"I knew little more till I found myself in the cell. All was like some awful nightmare.

"Five years' penal servitude; that was my sentence.

Robson never came near me, but poor, kind-hearted Peters did, and I told him all my story. There was just one ray of pleasure shining through my darkness, when I found that Peters believed and pitied me from his inmost soul.

"I need not tell you all the misery I endured from my first months of solitary confinement until I found myself a nameless, numbered wretch working in a gang at P——.

"I resolved to escape some time. That is, I should make the attempt, and if I was shot dead in my endeavour, I should be out of all my misery.

"But two years passed away and I never had a chance — till one day.

"My conduct had always been represented as exemplary, and I believe I was about the last man any one could have suspected of harbouring designs of escape.

"My attempt was a most daring one.

"We were working at the foot of an apparently inaccessible cliff, but from my boyhood I had been an athlete and a splendid climber.

"Well, on this particular day, when I broke and made a dash for the cliff, the fog was so dense that men were invisible five yards away.

"The entrance to the quarry was extra well guarded, but not the cliff-top.

"For a considerable time I was not missed, and my companions in servitude would have been the last to inform.

"But, oh! that terrible, terrible cliff! I had kicked off my shoes and clung to it as I slowly ascended with bleeding fingers and feet. It was steep and high, and many times I missed footing, holding on only by the hands, expecting every second to fall and be dashed to pieces. I was just beginning to despair, and had resolved to drop and end it all, when a bush of broom, waving in the breeze, flicked across my face.

"I grasped it—and was free.

"Free so far, that is.

"Every moment was precious, yet would I not fly until I had knelt down there on the green cliff-top and thanked God, while the tears streamed over my cheeks, that so far he had aided my deliverance.

"I heard bells ringing now and guns fired, and knew that soon all the country-side would be apprised of the convict's escape.

"But the fog was my best friend; and for a whole week I journeyed on and on, sleeping in the woods all day, travelling only at night, and living entirely on raw turnips or even mangolds.

"Well, boys, here I am; and I have hopes I may yet escape entirely. But these awful clothes and my stubbly beard may prove my ruin."

Ernest sat in silence for some time. He was thinking.

"We do, indeed, pity you," he said at last. "Remain here to-night, and to-morrow morning you shall be rid of both beard and clothes."

Ernest Elliot was as good as his word; and when, next forenoon, Laurie and Leebie came to the cave, they were much surprised to find, sitting by the fire reading, a comparatively well dressed young man, clean-shaven and respectable-looking.

But the situation had not been without a touch of humour, which only showed how clever Ernest was.

It is a fact then that deserters have been known to exchange clothes with a scarecrow in a potato field, and so begging their way home in rags. Well, Ernest not only brought the convict a decent suit of clothing long before it was light, but he took away the convict's clothes, carried them to a field not far away, and exchanged them for the dress of the scarecrow therein.

He brought back the old ragged habiliments and burned them in the cave, assuring Wilson Webb that the scarecrow made a very pretty convict indeed.

But there was a method in Ernest's madness or folly; for the warders had followed the convict directly north, getting a clew here and there to direct them, and the potato field lay to the north of the haunted house.

It all turned out, therefore, just as Ernest wished it to.

For the pursuers, while Webb lay *perdu* in the cave, appeared on the moor, where the boys and Leebie were playing with Bobbie, Ned, and the dogs.

They were questioned, of course, and right frankly did Laurie tell the story of their having seen the convict in the old house; and off went the minions of the law.

Not finding their man, they pursued their course still to the north, and they had not proceeded more than a mile before they came in sight of the convict scarecrow.

They laughed with very joy now.

"We'll have him," cried one, rubbing his hands. "We've only to find out how the scarecrow was dressed, and send its description to every police office within a hundred miles."

And this they did.

But all in vain; so after a whole week of further searching, they returned to P——, disheartened and disappointed men.

Wilson Webb stayed safely for ten days in the cave, going out for exercise only at night. During this time, by his kindly, pleasant voice, by the stories he told, and the sweet music he elicited from Ernest's violin, Wilson Webb quite endeared himself to the children, and Leebie was in tears when at last he bade her and Laurie good-bye with the intention of starting very early next morning.

Now Ernest Elliot was a young fellow that did

nothing by halves; Webb had over a hundred miles yet to walk to the city of C——.

This would take him over a week. So the question arose how should he subsist all that time. If Ernest had possessed money, Webb would have had it. But he did not.

"Happy thought!" he cried all at once. "You shall borrow my violin."

"Can you really trust me with it?"

"That I can and will," said the brave boy.

"Well, I shall take it, and I shall send or bring it back; and never while I live shall I forget to pray Heaven to bless you for all your goodness to me."

Before daylight next morning the ex-convict Webb was ten good miles from the cave on the moor, and that very forenoon, in a little rustic village, a crowd stood around him to listen to the magic sounds he elicited from Ernest's violin, and he soon had enough money to keep him for one day at least.

And so, from village to village, day by day, he journeyed on. Not directly north now, however; for he had determined not to approach his own city, where so many might know him, until his hair had once more grown long.

The story of his wanderings as an itinerant fiddler would fill a volume; for he was often taken off the street into private houses, where parties were being given. This paid well, and his perform-

ance on his pet instrument was everywhere greatly admired.

Towards Christmas he was within fifteen miles of C——, and now he had to be doubly cautious, and therefore he only appeared on the streets of villages after dark.

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CHAPTER VII

THE CONFESSION

"Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damned,
Be thy intents wicked or charitable,
Thou comest in such a questionable shape,
That I will speak to thee." — SHAKESPEARE.

"My guilt is all before thee spread,
Thou awful spirit of the dead." — ANON.

WILSON WEBB's friend Peters was passing quietly along a rather dark street in C—— one night when a hand was placed on his shoulder, and, looking quickly round, behold! there stood beside him a tallish man, in a slouch hat and with a heavy, dark beard.

He carried under his arm, in a green baize bag, a fiddle.

"Peters, dear boy, you will not know me, but I am Webb, the ex-convict —"

There was right hearty handshaking now, after which Peters said: —

"Come with me to my private room, where we can talk unmolested. We can gain admittance by a side door."

"One single question first, Peters. Is Madeleine alive and well?"

"She is, my dear fellow, and she has not forgot-

ten you. We have all along believed in your innocence, and what is more, in the guilt of the unhappy creature Robson."

As soon as they entered the private room, Wilson Webb laid aside his false beard.

"Why," cried Peters, shaking him once more by the hand, "you are not a bit altered."

"And yet," said Webb, "the sufferings I have endured would have turned many a man into a raving maniac."

"Well, I trust they are over now. But you appear to me like one come back from the dead."

"I have come from worse than death."

"But are you aware, Wilson, that in yesterday's paper it is reported that you were captured in a wood two days ago, after a fierce resistance, and so severely wounded that you died in two hours' time?"

"I have not read it, but the authorities have evidently done this to cloak their incapacity to secure the escaped convict."

"Well, Webb, I see my way to make something out of this, if you will be guided by me."

"I shall do whatever you advise me. And now, tell me, is Robson still in your firm?"

"No, no, no; he has left over a year. His gambling propensities led him to drink. He is now living in mean lodgings, no one knows how, only that he sells tips, and is seldom ever sober."

"Does he believe me dead?"

"Yes, and that is what I am coming to. I visited

him yesterday with some jellies mother gave me, and found him ill in bed, and almost delirious.

"Wilson Webb," he continued, "I have a plan. But first I must consult the doctor; for the fright I should like to give Robson might kill the wretch outright, and this is no part of my intention."

Dr. Scrivener, though a youngish man, was an ardent student of psychology, and when Peters told him in confidence all his friend Webb's sad story from the beginning till now, and what he intended to do, he entered into his plans with heart and soul.

For the bold young doctor saw an article in the *British Medical Journal* looming in the near future, with perhaps honour and glory and a practice in London to follow.

In a day or two, then, after Wilson Webb's first visit to Peters' rooms, Scrivener and he made their way to the drunkard's den.

There lay Robson with a face that was ghastly white, with dark, dilated eyes that had in them the look of a hunted wild beast, with his thin hands clutching at the coverlet, and perspiring at every pore.

He knew the doctor and Peters, however, and tried to sit up in bed to give them a welcome, but fell back on the pillows helpless.

"What a terrible night I have had!" he cried. "No sleep, no sleep, or if I closed my eyes for a moment it was but to awaken next moment shrieking from a fearful dream. And the room and the

very bed were crowded with creeping, crawling, slimy things, that gazed at me piteously, pityingly. Tell me, doctor, tell me, shall I get over this, or must I die?"

"I shall be better able to tell you to-night," said Dr. Scrivener, with his finger on the man's pulse. "We have brought you some magazines and newspapers. You had better try to read. It will help to steady your nerves by keeping your mind always in the same groove."

"Here," said Peters, "is the account of the death of your old friend, the forger. I will read it."

"No! no! no!" shrieked Robson.

But Peters read it, nevertheless.

It was a fearfully graphic sketch.

"Oh! Oh! OH!" groaned Robson, "and I killed him — I killed him! I mean," he said, "that I should not have appeared. That is all. That is all."

"Well," said Scrivener, "I will call to-night."

When they did call, they left Wilson Webb just outside the door, and after they had talked a little with the sick man, whom they found calmer, Webb came slowly stalking in, leaned his elbow on the mantelpiece, and turned his dark sad eyes towards Robson.

"Look! look!" shrieked the latter. "'Tis he. 'Tis *he*. Take him away! Oh, take him off! There is blood upon his brow."

"Come, come, my good fellow. I must give you opium and send you to sleep if you carry on like

this. There is no one here save Mr. Peters and myself."

But Robson had raised himself on the bed now.

"Speak, Webb! Speak!" he cried. "What brings your spirit here?"

"I come to haunt you. Nevermore shall I leave you, night nor day. You have encompassed my ruin, and you know it. Only a confession from you, that shall clear me before my friends and relatives, is the price of my absence."

"Do you hear him? Do you hear him?"

Robson was appealing to the doctor.

"We hear nothing, we see nothing. Come, come, you must lie down and try to compose yourself. We are going now, but will soon return, and I shall give you an opiate then."

"Take him with you!" the wretched man shrieked. "Take him, oh, take him!"

They went quietly out, but stopped just outside, where they could hear all.

"I confess. I confess, Wilson; this is my dying confession, and, oh, may Heaven forgive me! Yes, it was I who forged the cheque. I am your murderer."

Poor Webb bowed his head. He had placed both hands over his face, and the tears were gushing through his fingers.

He sank into a chair.

"I will go soon," he said, "and I promise not to harm you."

Robson now seemed to fall into a kind of trance, from which he did not awake until a magistrate came with Dr. Scrivener and Peters and proceeded at once to take his deposition. The confession was written down by a clerk. It was made in simple yet graphic language, yet the depth of the man's guilt horrified all who heard it.

But the man was calmer after all was over. The doctor pricked his arm now, inserting under the skin a few drops of fluid, and in a minute's time the wretch was sound asleep.

When Scrivener came next morning, the nurse told him the patient had passed a good night. He was sensible, but very weak.

He adhered to his confession, however, and in a few days' time he was able to be removed to prison.

Before the judge, and in a crowded court, poor Wilson himself being there, he repeated all he had already confessed and even gave additional details, and when asked if he considered that there were any extenuating circumstances in his case, he replied in a firm voice:—

"No, no; none. Gambling has been my ruin; that is all. I ask my old friend's pardon and his prayers. But I desire nothing better than to be declared guilty, and to work out whatever punishment or sentence the law shall inflict. While doing so, I shall be calmer in mind than I have been for many a long sad year."

* * * * *

And so the gambler, the forger and drunkard, passes out of our story, and I know not that he will appear again at all; for soon our scenes and adventures must change, and we want no black spot to blur the picture of young and happy lives.

Well, the old firm reinstated Wilson Webb, but gave him higher wages than previously, and in a few months he was his own happy self once more. But he added to his salary by playing as a violinist at many a concert. He did not forget to return young Ernest Elliot's violin, for he had hired a good one, and was soon rich enough to purchase it.

But when Madeleine confessed one night that she more than cared for him, Wilson's cup of bliss was full.

This is not a love story, or I should tell the reader more. I may just say, however, that Wilson determined to make riches or, at all events, enough of the world's "gear" to enable him to marry.

This he could never do at home, and so his thoughts soon turned to lands beyond the sea.

There was nothing on earth he would not do or endure in the hope of being able to provide a home for Madeleine; and a year or two, he told her, would soon pass by.

Of course, womanlike, she could but weep, and her tears were her only reply to his proposal.

Yes, Wilson Webb would emigrate. He was still in the summer of his youth. "Time had not cropped the roses from his cheeks, though sorrow long had washed them."

He somehow felt sure that he would succeed. A chance, he told himself, was all he needed. Ah, well! perhaps. Anyhow, it is true what Bulwer Lytton, novelist, has told us; namely, that

“In the lexicon of youth, which fate reserves
For a bright manhood, there is no such word
As Fail.”

CHAPTER VIII

TO THE LAND OF THE WEST

"To the West! to the West! to the land of the free!
Where mighty Missouri rolls down to the sea;
Where the young may exalt and the aged may rest,
Away, far away, to the land of the West!"

WHEN Wilson Webb landed at New York, after a somewhat long but really restful voyage, it was with no very fixed notion as to what he should do. But this plucky young fellow was very far indeed from being one of those easy-going, slow-minded people who can live quietly and contentedly for any length of time in the expectation of something turning up. Such men as these are not the salt of the earth; on the contrary, they are a positive clog to the earth and, figuratively speaking, do their best to prevent it from going round.

No, Wilson Webb determined to *make* something turn up. He had not a very great deal of money, it is true, but he had the next best thing to wealth; namely, a light and hopeful heart. And he had, moreover, excellent credentials.

Being strong and healthy, and hardly yet twenty-five years of age, time was not of very great moment to him. That was one reason why he had come out

to the West in a somewhat slow ship, rather than with an ocean greyhound. The other was, that it was cheaper. The vessel was laden with emigrants forward, most of whom came on board at Queenstown, from Cork and the country round about. Poor, half-starved-looking Irish folks; the men carrying bundles, thinly clad, with holes in their clothes where never a hole should be; some with brimless hats, black pipes, and shillalahs; the women carrying nothing, but with white pinched faces, and little bits of shawls around their heads.

Wilson had felt sad and sorry for them. Luckily for himself, he had secured a berth on deck — abaft the quarter-deck in a petty officer's cabin; for, ex-convict though he was, and inured to the doubtful amenities of prison life, he had never before seen such abject misery and wretchedness as that which for the first few days after putting to sea, existed down below in the steerage.

Wilson had made a friend of the young surgeon, and he took him to see things. The men's sleeping-berths were off the steerage, and each was simply two large shelves with a narrow passage between. On these shelves, which were but a little raised above the deck, with a rag or blanket each, the men lay side by side, packed like herrings. Out in the main steerage itself, the deck was covered with men and women in every stage of *mal de mer*, and so terrible was the aroma that Wilson was glad, indeed, when he found himself on deck again.

The vessel, however, was well found as to victuals, but sick or not sick, every poor soul was bundled on deck every morning, and the hose turned into the steerage for a general wash and scrub down.

But things soon mended, and then even the steerage folks were not so badly off. At all events, they had, like Wilson himself, hope in their hearts. Were they not leaving poverty and misrule behind them in dear "ould Oirland"? Were not they and their little ones bound for the new land,

"Where children are blessings, and he who hath most
Hath aid to his fortune and riches to boast"?

The steerage passengers, as soon as they got over the horrors of *mal de mer*, were excellent customers to the beef-tub. Moreover, they kept on deck pretty well all day long, which showed their excellent sense.

On fine evenings, Wilson Webb would tune his fiddle and, going forward, seat himself somewhere about the fo'c's'le, and the poor Irish people crowded round him.

When he played "The Last Rose of Summer" or "The Wearing of the Green," his listeners made no attempt to hide their tears; indeed, it was no uncommon thing to see some grey-haired woman throw herself into her daughter's arms and sob aloud. And even the men themselves were but little less affected. For they were leaving behind them all they held dear in life.

"Farewell, for I must leave thee,
My own, my native shore,

And doom'd in foreign lands t' dwell,
May never see thee more.
For laws, our tyrant laws, have said
That seas must roll between
Old Erin and her faithful sons,
Who love to wear the green."

Ah! but Wilson Webb knew how to change all this, to rekindle hope in every breast and cause those poor, patriotic people to smile through their tears; so he would dash into a merry, blood-stirring jig.

What a scene that was, now! What a tribute to the power of music!

"Hooch! Hooch! Hurrah! Hurrah!" Hats were waved, shillalahs twirled, while old and young, even the children, joined that mad and mazy dance, till all were ready to drop with fatigue. Then the music ceased, and all was quiet once more.

But one beautiful evening so excited were they, that they must seize the fiddler and march three times round the deck with him, carrying him shoulder-high.

Well, Wilson Webb told himself he was going to feel quite at home in America; he had a bold front, was willing to work and defy any difficulties he was likely to encounter.

New York is really a go-ahead place. The business population there do not go to sleep on their legs, as they seem to on Fleet Street and the Strand. New Yorkers do everything quickly; they walk smartly, they eat quickly, drink quickly, and think quickly. And Wilson Webb would speedily have caught this

electric fever of life, even if he had not had it before.

He managed to get into good but cheap lodgings on the very day he landed, and that same afternoon he sallied forth to make a circuit of some of the first-class business houses.

Wilson was ambitious.

Ambition, within due bounds, is a glorious thing, and I like to see it in the young. True, they may never altogether secure their object, but the attempt to do so will carry them higher, anyhow, than they would otherwise have been had they contented themselves with crawling instead of flying.

If you aim an arrow at the moon, you won't hit it. True, but your arrow will go higher far than if it had been aimed at a bush of broom.

Well, every city merchant talked kindly enough to Wilson, but they were sorry that at present, etc., — just the well-worn old formula.

So he had no luck for several days.

He didn't lose heart, however.

He did as Captain Webb did, — when swimming across the channel, he just kept pegging away.

Now some may tell you, reader, that the Americans want to keep all America to themselves, and that they have no wish to encourage the Britisher, or to give him work. This is nonsense. If a New York merchant believes it would be to his advantage to engage the services of a deserving young fellow, he will certainly not stop to inquire into his nationality.

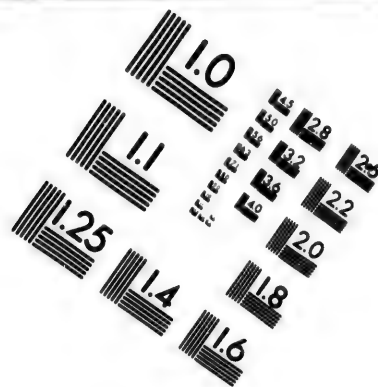
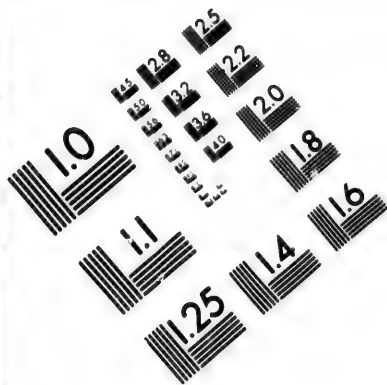
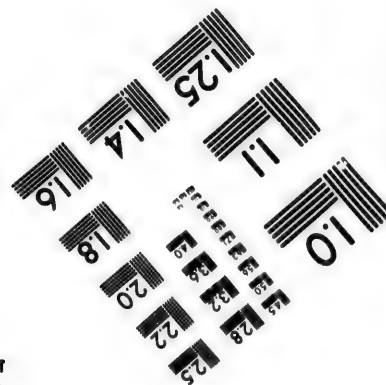
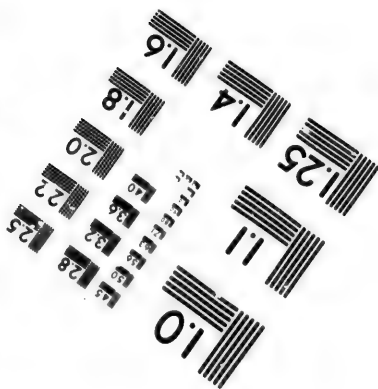
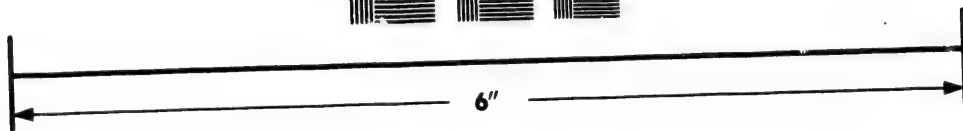
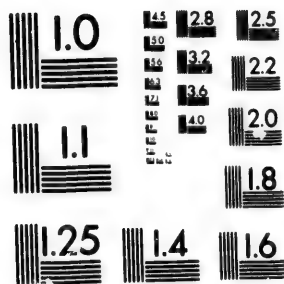


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And so in a splendid office which he entered one forenoon, Wilson found a white-haired old gentleman who frankly told him he liked his looks and would gladly give him a trial.

"If you prove worthy," he said, "I shall advance you a step in a week or two."

"A thousand thanks, sir! But now before actually engaging me, I should like you to know a little more of my story. I am an ex-convict sir."

"*You an ex-convict! You!*"

The old man looked at him incredulously, and then burst into a hearty laugh.

"Could I see you in private, sir, for just a few minutes?"

"Yes, certainly; come into my little den here."

Before they left that little den, Wilson Webb had told all his sad story. The merchant was deeply interested.

He shook the young man by the hand.

"How you must have suffered!" he said; "but I must tell you straight, that your conduct has quite won my heart, and you must look upon me as a friend."

Wilson Webb left the beautiful office walking upon air. That was how he felt, at all events.

He entered upon his duties the very next day.

At the end of a week he had another interview with Mr. Slatten.

"I'm going to put you to another desk," he said; "it will be a more responsible post, but it will also be far more remunerative."

So, to his great joy, Wilson was promoted.

He did his duty too.

But his lodgings, though poor, were comfortable, and the old landlady kind ; so he stuck to them, his object being to save as much money as he possibly could, then send for Madeleine.

* * * *

One day in early spring Laurie and Leebie had gone early to the cave on the moor, because as soon as Ernest arrived they meant to spend quite a long time at the water's side.

Neddy had, for some reason or another which he would not reveal, taken quite a fancy to the squire's young son, and as soon as his own young folks were settled at the cave, he used to amble off to the distant wood to meet Ernest. He was always accompanied by little Sir Duncan Currie, and very important and serious the wee dog looked ; but whether he went to look after Neddy or only for companionship, it would be impossible to say.

Well, on this particular morning Ernest came riding towards the cave at the gallop, the wee terrier barking for joy. It was evident there was news of some sort to tell.

"A great, big, long letter from Wilson Webb," said Ernest, dismounting. "And there is one for you inside it, Leebie, and one for you too, Laurie."

So these youngsters did not go to the river that day as soon as they had purposed, because those letters were all to be read, not once, but several times.

They were so instructive, and so jolly and joyful. Then Leebie had to read Laurie's, and Ernest's also, and the boys read hers; in fact, everybody read everybody else's, and there was much talk about them afterwards.

"How I should like to go to America!" said Ernest.

"And I," said Laurie.

"And I too," said Leebie.

Ernest Elliot was silent for a short time.

Ernest was thinking. He was not given to much of that sort of thing, it is true. But at present he was gazing at the crackling logs on the hearth, with dreamy eyes, and evidently in a fit of abstraction.

"Suppose," he said abruptly, at last, "we don't go fishing this forenoon, only just to catch a few for dinner. Suppose we leave fishing, on a large scale, till afternoon."

"And what shall we do with ourselves till dinner time?" said Laurie.

"Oh, you are to come with me. I want to show you my estate."

"Your estate?"

"Yes," said Ernest, laughing. "I have told you before that I was the youngest son. Well, my brothers all pop in before me and would have everything, the great hall and all, if poor father were to die. But he won't for many, many years to come. Well, I know he loves me quite as much as George or Dempsey or Harold; so I was not surprised when

he took me with him yesterday on a far ride to the outside boundaries of the estate.

“‘Do you see that farm,’ he said, pointing to old Wigmore’s house, ‘and the half-tilled land around it?’

“‘Yes,’ I replied wonderingly.

“‘Well,’ said father, ‘it is only about a hundred acres, but it is all yours. For *that* is not entailed.’

“I almost cried with joy, and rode nearer to him that I might press his hand.

“‘But,’ he added, ‘you must go to sea first, or go somewhere or other to fight and battle with the world, and make some money; for I have none to give you. Then you can return and settle down here, and shoot and fish and hunt and do just as you please.’ And now, Laurie, let us be off and have a look at my estate.”

Well, Leebie and Ernest rode on Bobbie and Ned, but Laurie much preferred to run with the dogs.

They arrived at last, after crossing several streams, in a beautiful rolling bit of country, and got high up on a hill-top.

“The farm standing yonder,” said Ernest, “is indeed a tumble-down old place, but when I make money, I’ll build a beautiful house on the rising banks of the little lake yonder; and there I shall keep a boat. I will till the arable land. I shall have a nice park, but the woods and the trees and hills shall all be untouched and sacred. Won’t that be lovely, Leebie?” he added.

"Oh," she cried, in raptures, "I think I see it all!"

Mere boy though he was, — barely sixteen, — Ernest was romantic, and he thought he saw something else in his future that was greatly to add to his joy. But he kept this to himself.

"Heigho!" he sighed, "I have got to make money first."

"And so must I," said Laurie. "I wonder how we are to do it."

"In the West, Laurie—in the West, old man. For father distinctly told me that this country was only for the wealthy, but for the workingman, unless he is a rogue, it is really played out."

Then they all sat down on the hill and read Wilson Webb's letters over again once more; after that they wandered away to the bank of the stream to fish for their dinner.

CHAPTER IX

WILSON WEBB IN COWBOY LAND

"Your spiritless stay-at-home shakes his head as he tells you
That ambition lures and leads one straight to the grave.
Bah! Wealth is a prize that is well worth the winning,
And we all know that Fortune still favours the brave."
— ANON.

WHETHER Slatten be a Scots name or not, I really do not know; but of one thing I am certain enough, — Slatten himself was a Scotsman. A self-made man too, and therefore just the individual who was likely to appreciate talent, or cleverness and the determination to do well, in others.

He lived in a very beautiful house near to Central Park, and was reported to be wealthy. He was upright, however, and had always refused to be one of "a corner," as it is called.

If he was Scotch, so were his wife and his seven daughters! Yes, he had seven, and never a son. Being Scotch, they were, of course, all musical, and when, somehow or other, it leaked out — everything *does* leak out in America — that Wilson Webb was a violinist, Slatten invited him frequently to the house and Mrs. Slatten made quite a pet of him.

The youngest daughter was nineteen, and really a

pretty girl. The eldest must have been six and thirty, though she "made up" well.

Not one of them was married, but from the many dinner and garden parties given, it was evident enough that their parents would have been glad to place them.

Wilson Webb soon got to like Miss Julia Slatten. There really was something winning about her, and something that at times reminded him of Madeleine. Was he likely to forget his English love? No, no; this I dare not believe. But I do believe that had he made up to Julia, his suit would have been favourably received, and he might have calculated on becoming a partner in the firm of Slatten, Limited.

Yes, everything leaks out in New York, and Wilson needn't have been surprised when, one evening a smart-looking young man with a note-book called at his humble lodgings and announced himself as one of the chief reporters of the *Weekly Hopper*. "Just dropped in," he said affably, "to extract a few notes from you for our far-famed weekly."

"You certainly do me high honour," returned Wilson; "but on what subject, pray?"

"Oh, you are an ex-convict, I hear. I want you to tell me something about life in British prisons. They will be of intense interest to our readers, and help to raise our circulation considerably."

"And, of course, you will pay handsomely for these notes, that are bound to raise your circulation?"

"Ah! Waal, now, we don't usually do *that* sort

of thing, but, in your case, if four or five dollars are of any use, we —”

He never finished the sentence, because Wilson was holding the door open for him.

“I am pleased to wish you a very good-night,” he said.

The reporter pleaded.

Wilson was obdurate.

But next evening, the young fellow had a visit from a man of a very different stamp; a quiet, white-haired gentleman, with pleasant manners and soldierly aspect.

After introducing himself, he said quietly: —

“You had a visit last evening from young Puffer, of the *Hopper*, who tried to draw you. Just like the *Hopper's* confounded cheek, and I'm just real glad you gave him the cold shoulder.

“But,” he added, “the subject of convict life in England would be an excellent draw. If you consent to give a course of interesting and exciting lectures here, I will run you. I will pay all expenses, and give you good remuneration, certain, and a big share in the gate-money.”

Wilson's eyes sparkled with delight. He never had lectured, it is true. But his appearance was fetching and his voice was good. So a bargain was soon struck; and that very night he began to write his lectures.

So full was he of his subject, and so thickly did old memories of the sufferings he had endured crowd

in upon him as he wrote, that he was surprised at the speed his pen attained.

Mr. Leader took the lectures away when finished, and had them type-written.

Then he got Wilson to read them privately to him, or one of them, and gave him many useful hints on delivery and deportment; and Wilson was a willing and a very apt pupil.

CONVICT LIFE IN ENGLAND.

BY

AN EX-CONVICT.

It made a very fetching placard indeed, and, as Americans dearly love everything that is new and interesting, the tickets were all sold in a day or two.

The lecture series was a great success, and all the newspapers gave a good review of them, praising the ex-convict who had endured so much, though innocent, and hitting England, or rather Britain, I should say, as hard as they knew how to, for her cruelty and her unjust laws. Only the *Hopper* came out with a scathing article, and had the audacity to say, they doubted not, if justice were meted out to him, Wilson Webb would be serving out the rest of his time at P—— instead of trying to star it in the great metropolis of the United States.

Mr. Leader himself read this article to Webb as they dined together at the Westminster Hotel.

The young man laughed.

"We don't take any notice of such journalistic sputterings in England," he said.

"Ah! but, my boy, you *must* here. And if you do as I tell you, I see my way to make capital out of it."

"Shall I have to shoot the editor, then?"

"No; but you must lash yourself to your little guns, in case the editor tries to have a shot at you."

"Shall I have to mop up the floor with him, then, and stand him on his head in the corner?"

"No; that is Texas style, and might do even here, but I'd prefer you to do something thoroughly English, and therefore original, and so I propose a dog whip."

* * * * *

The editor of the *Hopper* was alone in his office when Wilson Webb entered.

The interview was short but *painful*, particularly so for the editor.

"Did you write that scurrilous article, sir?"

The editor confessed, but tried to open his desk in order to reach his guns.

Wilson struck down the lid with his strong fist, actually shattering it, for he was an athlete. Then he sprang nimbly at his man, threw him down, stool and all, and proceeded to administer chastisement such as he had never administered to a man before, far less a dog.

Leader was just outside, and had taken good care to inform the people what was going on; and when

they heard the editor's screams, they hooted and jeered, and cheered as well, especially when Wilson himself stepped quietly out, and stopped a few seconds to light a cigarette.

There was no policeman anywhere near. Mr. Leader was a good general.

But every newspaper had a bit about the affair next day. The conduct of this brave Englishman was highly extolled, and the rest of the series of lectures was more successful than even the first.

But Mr. Leader was not going to give him up just yet, and determined to run him in the cities of the South.

"I'm really very sorry to part with you," said kind-hearted Mr. Slatten, "but it will be for your good; and I shall live in hopes that when you have finished lecturing, you will come back to us."

Poor Julia was in tears when Wilson left her. Would she never, never see him more? Well, who could answer that?

I think it was in Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington that Wilson's lectures were most appreciated, and by the course he managed to save nearly a thousand pounds.

"I think," said Leader, one morning at breakfast, "we had better finish off at San Francisco."

"Well," said Wilson, "I shall be pleased to, but first and foremost, I should like to see a little cowboy life in, say, New Mexico. And I will tell you why: American shows and lectures on wild western life,

illustrated with the lantern, are popular in England. Well, having mastered my subject, I purpose going back to my own tight little island, having made a bit of money, and marrying the dearest, sweetest giri on earth."

"Bravo, lad! You're a true-born Briton, and your intention speaks well for the goodness of your heart, though it ain't what we Americans would call business."

"Pray explain."

"Well, poor little Julia Slatten is deeply in love with you, and by marrying her you would soon be a partner in the big firm. The subject is worth consideration."

"My dear Leader," said Wilson, almost solemnly, "were I to debate the subject with myself, even for a minute, I should be untrue to my God, untrue to myself, and untrue to the girl I left behind me. Pray say no more."

Leader looked at him wonderingly, but said nothing.

* * * * *

It was shortly after this, that Leader and Wilson Webb parted. They had been very great friends, because each respected even the idiosyncrasies as well as the opinions of the other. And I do think that a man's or a boy's opinions are his private property, and no one else has any business to trespass thereon, any more than he has to enter his garden and trample down his flowers.

Leader went north. Wilson Webb went west in search of adventures, and we must follow him.

He took with him a beautiful and instantaneous photographic apparatus; not large, but most true and efficient. He wanted to get pictures for the lantern, and determined that they should be true to the life.

Besides the camera, Wilson took with him a good light rifle and a pair of excellent six-shooters, but no fowling-piece. "Your cowboy," Leader told him, "despised what he called a 'scatterer,' and most of them are excellent shots."

All the money he did not actually require, Wilson put in a safe bank. He dressed himself simply as an Englishman, in shooting-jacket and cap, with strong boots; but the summer was already drawing to a close, so he did not forget to furnish himself with clothing that would stand all the storms and rigours of the Rocky Mountains, and defy even a blizzard itself.

Wilson Webb was nothing unless romantic. As a mere lad he had often read about the cowboys and the cowboy country, and one of his chief delights while residing in the city of C——, long before evil days had fallen upon him, was to borrow or hire a good horse — he called the nag a broncho — and go for a long ride across the bare open country or wolds. He thus became a most expert and daring rider. Moreover, he was a good shot either with rifle or revolver, and when only sixteen had come in

second at a volunteer review. Young Wilson, on more occasions than one, had attempted to lasso farmers' shorthorns. But his practice was certainly nothing to be proud of. Once, and once only, he succeeded in hitching on to a strong and agile cow.

That cow did not let him forget it. She tore away at a terrific rate, and finally not only pulled him out of his seat, saddle and all, but dragged him some considerable distance across country. The broncho followed. He evidently thought it was all a part of the performance. But when Wilson returned to C——, he was very sore indeed, and a shilling hardly covered his expenses for sticking-plaster alone.

Well, at four and twenty he was just as fond of adventure as he had been at fourteen, and he calculated he would meet with one or two in the little town he finally brought up at.

I may say at once, however, that he did not find the cowboys the irreclaimable, wild, and reckless men he had read about.

A few were madeaps, it is true, but many were far more noble and honest and straightforward, than his own countrymen who belonged to the working classes.

Wilson had travelled most of the journey in the really old-fashioned way; namely, by waggon. He passed by many a ranch and stayed for the night at many a small town. But all were too civilised for his notions.

So westward, and westward ever, he went, until at long last he cast anchor at a queer little town with a queer little name; to wit, "*We're-all-here.*"¹ Why it should have been called so, I have not the remotest notion. It was a town of log or turf shanties and houses; badly lighted, if, indeed, it could be said to be lighted at all.

The principal buildings in it were the gaol, the sheriff's house, the office of the *Independent*, the doctor's hut, and the drinking saloon.

Wilson arrived about midday, while the sun shone down on this Rocky Mountain slope with a heat that seemed enough to melt lead.

He was riding a really good horse, and the waggon was coming slowly up behind. He wore a red Garibaldi shirt and knickerbockers, his head covered with a broad-brimmed felt sombrero, lined with green leaves.

Probably he ought to have called on the sheriff first, but he didn't know there was any such functionary here. So he asked for the name and office of the newspaper, and from the group of wiry-looking, picturesque men, one stepped forth and stood by his saddle.

"We air the editor," he said, extending his hand, "and if yer means to stay among us for a time, we'll do our best to put ye up to the ropes. See?"

"I do, and many thanks. I'll dismount, and lead my horse out of the sun."

¹ The natives always put the emphasis on the "*We.*"

"As nice a broncho as ever we saw. What say ye, boys?"

There was a murmur of assent, and a brown-faced youth stepped up and offered to see to the nag.

Wilson willingly gave him up.

"Boys," continued the editor of the *Independent*, "here we have before us a raal stranger. From his talk he is a British, and mebbe a bit of a tender-foot. Most Britishers are. Never mind; we have a duty before us, and that is to show this green Englishman all the hospitality we can, and all the fun. Now, stranger, shake hands, and come to the saloon. I guess yer neck'll steam when ye pour something down it."

Well, not only did the editor accompany Wilson to the saloon, but at least a dozen cowboys. He was not one who cared to drink, but he could not turn his back upon such well-meaning hospitality. So he swallowed the whisky placed before him, although it went down like fixed bayonets.

After this he requested the pleasure of standing the cowboys' drinks, round.

They consulted just for a few moments; then one tall, handsome fellow laid a great, hard hand on Wilson's shoulder.

"No, sirree," he said; "for three days, at least, you'll never attempt to show silver in 'We're-all-here.' If ye do, you'll offend us. There!"

"I don't want to do that, I can assure you."

After this the talk became general, and Wilson was learning something new every minute.

That same afternoon he got settled in a very decent "'dobe" house, and thought himself exceedingly lucky.

CHAPTER X

A GREEN ENGLISHMAN

"Let us never judge too harshly,
Mind, — this life is but a dream,
And all experience tells us
Folks are seldom what they seem.
There's many a sweet, sweet kernel
Within a rough nut's shell;
And the roughest face a kindly heart may hide,
For aught that we can tell." — ANON.

WHEN the editor of the *Weekly Western Independent* entered Wilson's shanty that evening, the young adventurer was very glad to see him, and shook hands right heartily. Then he rolled his fiddle in a soft, silk handkerchief, and placed it in its case. He loved that Strad. of his, far more than he could have loved a baby, and took greater care of it, too.

"Take the easy-chair, Mr. Whetstone, and try those cigars," said Wilson.

Well, if one had not been told that it was an easy-chair, one might have been inclined to doubt it.

The chair was merely a small flour-barrel turned upside down, so that one sat on the bottom of it. But it had a semilunar back fitted to it, and it was upon this that its claim to its title rested.

Whetstone sat down and stretched his legs easily out in front of him; then he lit a cigar.

He was very simply, if not picturesquely, dressed. In fact, he wore nothing very much to speak of; a flannel shirt with its sleeves rolled up over the elbows, a pair of flannel pants rolled up to the knees. Both garments might have been white originally. A pair of canvas shoes graced his feet, and a soft broadbrim his head. But in a belt around his waist, were stuck his guns and a bowie. He had once had a pistol pocket, but that was worn out.

The expression on the man's face, however, was far from unkindly, though his jaws were lantern and his brows heavy.

Wilson handed him a fan for refrigeratory purposes, and to keep the "skeeters" as much at bay as possible.

But this enterprising editor carried a note-book.

"I mean, sir," he said, "to come out with a flamer on Saturday. A col. and a half, sir, and it is all to be devoted to Wilson Webb, the stranger who has come to spy out the nakedness of our land."

"Fiddlesticks!" said Webb, "I don't see much nakedness about it. I've come here to study your cowboys, and cowboy life in general, and to find some fun and some adventures.

"And," he added, "when I get back to Merry England, as it is sarcastically called, I mean to give lectures on cowboys, and this same city of 'We're-all-here' shall be the centre."

"And in course ye'll lecture and fiddle a piece to us poor benighted sons of the Sierras?"

"If it can amuse you, I will with pleasure."

"Shake," said Whetstone, holding out his broad brown hand. "I say, young fellow, your heart ain't far out o' plumb."

"And now," he added, "I guess we'll have to put in an appearance at the saloon. Just to show we know how to be friendly. The Doc. will be there. The Doc. is a good fellow, and I guess no one ever saw him any the worse for whisky. We'll mebbe meet ten or a dozen of the boys, besides more that'll be playin' poker on the barrel-heads. Do you play draw-poker?"

"No," said Wilson; "I play the fiddle."

"That's about right. Well, if Nate Buster comes any of his games with you, we ourself will back you up."

"Who is Nate Buster, may I ask?"

"Nate's right name is Bloomsbury—a daurned sight too good for him, so we call him Buster. Nate's been on the roar for over a week, but he hasn't killed anybody yet. More's the wonder. But mind ye this, sir, Buster is a rare good fellow when he has got anything more'n fifteen inches o' old rye in his stomach. Only, as I said, he's on the roar and may want to tickle a stranger. So I advise you to have your shootin'-irons handy, in case ye need to kill him. And mind, don't be shy or skeery about it. Nobody'd miss Nate very much, and the Doc.

and we ourself would see ye all straight wi' the sheriff.

"And now we'll saunter."

After lighting fresh cigars, they did saunter.

The saloon was brilliantly lighted. The landlord, a short, stout man with an immense beard, was busy enough dispensing "the pizen," assisted by his wife and pretty little daughter, while the boys, none of whom were more heavily dressed than the editor himself, were lolling around in every attitude of ease, if not grace.

"Nominate," said Whetstone.

"Whisky," said Wilson, though far rather would he have had a glass of cold water.

A red-faced, but pleasant-looking, man entered just at that moment. He was dressed in spotless white flannels, with rings, and a huge gold chain.

"Ah! Doc.," cried the editor, "very pleased! Here is a young fellow all the way from the Breetish islands. What'll you drink?"

"Just water to-night."

"Water!"

"Ay. Going to a nasty case."

He leaned over the bar and patted Lizzie on the cheek. She was evidently a favourite of the doctor's.

"You'll come to see me, won't you?" he said to Wilson.

"That I will, with great pleasure."

"Well, good-night, all. See you later on, perhaps."
And off he went.

The boys, glasses in hand, now crowded round Wilson, and his friend, the editor. They did not get much news in this far-off town, and wanted to hear Wilson yarn a bit.

A whole hour passed away pleasantly enough. The boys certainly had dubbed Wilson a "poor drinker," but he did not mind that a bit. He had made a resolution not to drink and not to play poker, and he told all hands that as plainly as he could speak it.

But suddenly a kind of awed hush fell over the party and a voice could be heard singing in the distance, and coming ever nearer. It was a maudlin old song.

"Whisky is the life of me,
Whisky! whisky!
Whisky killed my brother Bill,
Whisky killed old daddy too,
But whisky is the life o' me,
Whisky for my Johnnie;
Hurrah! Whoop!

That "whoop" was a yell, and with it Nate Buster brought up in the doorway of the saloon.

"Boys, Nate's on the roar! Whoop! Boys, Nate's goin' to shoot! Stand by for hats and heads! Hurrah!"

He had a six-shooter in each hand, and though really not a bad-looking fellow, he appeared very reckless.

"Who says Nate's hand ain't steady? See that bottle o' old rye on the shelf?"

Bang! He fired, and the bottle was decapitated.

"Put her on the plank, landlord. Nate can pay."

Then his eye fell upon Wilson Webb, who was leaning on the counter, glass in hand, and looking very cool and unconcerned.

Nate now changed his tone in a moment.

"What!" he cried, in the wheedling voice of some old woman. "Who have we here? Some tender-foot? A green Englishman? Eh? Some mother's darling, fresh out from England, home, and beauty? And how's his little toes, then?"

"If you want to know, you shall," said Wilson, calmly; "for, if you don't keep quiet, I'll kick you out."

Knowing that a terrible row was brewing, every one drew off, and Wilson and Nate stood facing each other.

"This to Nate! And from a Breetisher too. Look, you stranger, I was thinkin' o' killin' ye, but I'll give you a chance. You shall dance to amuse the boys, and, if you refuse, I'll blow the whole top o' your head off. Dance!"

It is an ugly situation, when one has to look down the barrel of a six-shooter in the hands of a maniac like Nate.

"Dance! I'll count six, and fire at seven.

"One, two, three. Dance, four —"

He never got any farther. Swift as lightning, Wilson threw his whisky straight in Nate's face, and the bullet fired found a billet in the ceiling.

Next moment the revolvers were wrenched from the drunkard's grasp, and a well-aimed blow between the eyes laid him sprawling on the floor.

"Bravo, Britisher! Bravo, Britain!" shouted the boys. But Nate sprang to his feet, and charged like a bull.

"I won't hit you any more," cried Wilson, "but out you go. I'll give you Cumberland."

Nate was but like a schoolboy in that young man's powerful clutch.

He threw him on the floor first, and held him down for fully a minute.

"That's Donald Dinnie style," he said. "Now for the grand fling." He lifted him up as he spoke. The editor himself opened the door, and Nate was tossed far out into the darkness.

There he lay groaning for fully five minutes, and then gathering himself up, crawled quietly home to his shanty. He had received enough at the hands of the green Englishman to last him a long time.

"And now, boys," cried Wilson, as all gathered, laughing, round the bar once more, "though, thanks be to Heaven, I never made a bet in my life, I'm willing now to wager one of my legs that I can do what Nate Buster couldn't. I'll make you all dance."

"Done! Done! We'll have the leg, stranger!"

Wilson simply said, "Excuse me for a minute."

Then he slipped out, and in a very short time had returned with his fiddle-case.

He tuned up and began to play — very slow and pathetic airs at first; yet the fact that as he played the eyes of nearly every cowboy there filled with tears, proved, I think, that they had hearts as soft as women's within their breasts, rough and uncouth though they were.

But Wilson soon changed his tunes. He stood right up on the top of a barrel, to be well out of the way when the fun began. And begin it did.

Not even in Scotland itself was madder, merrier dancing ever seen, and it was kept up for hours, too.

But Wilson himself got tired at last, and was just about to loosen a peg, when in glided the doctor again.

"Yes, my case is over. And well over. The old lady has gone to a better world. But lo! I've been losing all the fun. Here, Lizzie, sweetheart, you and I *must* have a waltz."

He lifted the laughing lassie right over the counter as he spoke. Wilson played a dreamland waltz, and no one in the room enjoyed himself more than did the Doc. and his sweet little partner.

In another hour, all was darkness and silence in that saloon and throughout all the deserted streets of "*We're-all-here*" itself.

There were no lights to be seen anywhere, and in all probability those honest, bold cowboys had gone to bed; for they had to rise right early every morning.

But Wilson still sat at his open window. It was a very bright and beautiful night, and his eyes were turned towards the snow-capped mountain range far

in the west, above which the moon shone in an unclouded sky, with here and there a tiny star.

It was very silent, though every now and then out yonder on the plains, twixt his house and the hills, he could hear short, yapping barks and even plaintive cries; but whether these proceeded from bird or from beast, Wilson could not tell.

Nor did he care much.

He sat up to think. He told himself so, at all events. I believe I am right in saying he was a restless kind of a being, this Wilson Webb. There are many such men in the world, and although their lives are not so happy as they would be if they only had more repose about them, still people like these are the salt of the earth, and I doubt if the world would wag long without them.

"Heigho!" said Wilson to himself; but it was not by any means an unhappy sigh. "I've been pretty lucky as yet. No, I haven't made a fortune, but £800 in a bank is a precious good nucleus, and I mean to make it multiply. Well, I'm all alone here in this city with the funny name. But those cow-boys don't seem to be half bad fellows. I hope I didn't hurt that poor idiot Nate. I'll go and see him to-morrow morning.

"I wonder what my friend Peters is doing at this moment. I wonder more what dear Madeleine is doing. Let me see: it will be early morning in England, and those strange boys, Ernest and Laurie, with their sweet wee sister Leeb, will be preparing

to ride off to the moor. But for them I should not be here now. God send that I may yet be able to reward them. Ah! I really have something to live for, — the boys and Madeleine.

“Well, after all, what would life be without work? A dream, a dream; an idle, useless, empty dream! I’ll off to bed and perhaps I shall dream of a future, that shall be ten times happier than all the past, as well it may.”

* * * * *

He threw the end of his cigar out of the window, but he did not close the casement. There was nothing much to be dreaded here. Wild beasts, wolves, and bears there might be, far away out yonder in the woods and dingles, at the foot of that terrible mountain range, but they kept well aloof from all human habitations. So he had nothing to fear and nothing to annoy, save the mosquitoes. By this time, however, he was inured to their venom, so he fell asleep with their songs ringing in his ears.

Wilson was up betimes, and the old dame who “saw to him” brought him a good breakfast. True, the steak was tough, but he was young and hungry, so he did justice to it.

“Now,” he said to himself, “I’ll go and see that never-do-well.”

He was directed to Nate’s shanty. It was as well known as Nate himself.

Wilson expected to find him ill in bed.

Not so; for Nate himself opened the door and in-

vited him in. Nate was sober and quiet; clothed and in his right mind.

"You gave me fits last night, old man, and I really deserved it. Shake hands. Come in. I haven't been much in bed. In grief, you see."

"In grief, Nate?"

"Yaas, stranger, in grief."

He pointed towards a cosy corner, near to the hearth, on which a fire of wood was burning. Here, on a bed of soft hay, with his head on a pillow of the same, lay a beautiful Scottish collie.

His brown eyes looked positively human, and as Nate knelt beside him, with tears in his eyes, the faithful dog extended his hot, red tongue and licked his master's hand.

"Tweed is the only real friend I have in the world," said the cowboy, "and if anything happened to him, I shouldn't care to live. I've been up all night with him, though I ain't far from ill myself, and I think he's a trifle better."

He smoothed the bonnie dog's brow, and Wilson was certain a tear fell thereon.

"Ah! stranger," he said, "the hardest bit to bear is this. I've so often neglected Tweed when on the roar! Oh, the accursed drink! But nevermore. No, nevermore; and if you'll only live Tweed, we'll both be as happy as the birds that sing."

Wilson had sadly misjudged poor Nate, then; for surely a man who could so sympathise with a sick and suffering dog must have some good in his heart. What think you, reader?

CHAPTER XI

A BUCK-JUMPING EXPERIENCE

"A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!"

'Tis true, 'tis pity; and pity 'tis, 'tis true, that not only in our own country, but in other lands as well, the very best hearted men, and those of the brightest intellect, all too often become slaves of the most fearful Fiend that stalks this earth by day or night, and that is Drink.

'Tis true, moreover, and more's the pity that it is true, that having once fallen, very few ever get up again. They sink lower and lower in the mire, until it closes over their heads, and their eyes are shut in the darkness of death.

But grief for his noble, faithful dog, seemed really to have worked wonders as far as Nate was concerned. He was, to all appearance, a new man. Tweed and he were never separate now, and Nate never forgot to feed him or give him the best water to be procured.

He did not abandon his visits to the saloon. He was no coward, and came there of an evening just as before. But that poisonous whisky which he used to sing about had no longer any charms for him.

The landlord welcomed him just the same, however; for he spent his money freely enough on others, if not on himself.

Wilson Webb had not been many weeks in "*We're-all-here*" before becoming a general favourite. That fiddle of his was in much repute. Moreover, his lectures were a great success; not financially, of course. He lectured gratuitously, his only reward being the thought that he was giving pleasure to these brave, though half-wild, cowboys; their rapt attention was his best reward, and their hearty bursts of applause and laughter were to him the greatest reward, and far better than many silver dollars.

But much of Wilson's time was spent, by day, either in shooting, or riding on the plains, assisting the cowboys with their work.

Farther to the east civilisation had already put in an appearance, and each man's herd of cattle was fenced in with wire, barbed or otherwise. But here the cattle still roamed free over the prairie, and the owners could only tell their own property by the brands.

It was the young calves that had to suffer the torture of branding with the red-hot iron, and cruelty of a revolting character it really seemed to Wilson Webb, who was probably far too tender-hearted to make up as a typical cowboy.

Nevertheless, he did his best, and if he did not quite succeed, it was not for lack of trying or dint of hard work.

Buffalo Bill and his company have made us all familiar with the rig-out of the cowboy, and Wilson took a lesson from those around him and dressed just as they did, although for a long time he and his strange boots were at daggers drawn. Nor did he altogether relish at first the broad felt hat, but he soon found that in galloping over the plains it was just the right thing in the right place.

Wilson's broncho continued to carry him splendidly, and under the kindly tuition of the cowboys he soon learned all the outs and ins of ranch life, even to the roping of the wilder cattle, or throwing the lasso.

Rightly or wrongly, I have always considered this the very acme of the cowboy's art.

Well away out eastwards in his journey towards the Rocky Mountains, Wilson had passed many ranches, the very civilisation of which did not please him, although he and his waggoners were well received and kindly treated. But these ranchers had their flocks wired in. They grew grass or hay too, and even grain for their bronchos. There wasn't enough romance here to satisfy the young man, so "Westward ho!" had ever been his song, and adventurous soul that he was, I do not think he ever regretted coming to the strange life of "*We're-all-here.*"

Autumn was coming on now. It was nearing that season which the Scots so beautifully express in those words, "The fa' o' the year."

The town was neither in the north nor south countries, properly speaking, but midway between. But on the plains towards the east it was rough enough in all conscience, and picturesque as well, without being actually romantic.

It was towards the everlasting hills and mountains that the romance and beauty, too, abode forever and for aye.

Out there it is sweet and delightful indeed, to watch the coming of the spring.

The ancients used to depict the goddess of spring as a beautiful lady with clinging, trailing garments of many bright colours, gliding across the land and scattering from her lap flowers of every shape and hue.

So might we imagine her in the month of April in these far-off hills and in the dells.

Softer winds are blowing now. Balmy they well may be called; for dreary winter finds no longer a place on the foot-hills, but must climb higher and higher up the bluff sierras. But the melting snows flood all the springs, and the snow that only a month or two ago was falling fast, is now changed into sleet or rain.

The rain raineth not every day, however; for there are very many hours of gladsome sunshine,—sunshine that maketh joyful the heart of many a bird and beast. There are buds now, downy buds, on the silvery bough; there are dusky green leaves on many a bush and flowering tree.

Flocks of mallards fly overhead, bound for the far

north. Willow grouse are everywhere. Many a wild bird 'gins to twitter and to sing, and the woods are carpeted with anemones snow-white and pink, and with the tender blossoms of sorrel.

And the green on the river banks grows broader and broader, and spreads out all over the land. It is, indeed, a hopeful time.

The ranch cattle feel it and know it. For the misery and wretchedness of winter is past, and the cow can gladsomely now lead her innocent wee dot of a calf afield. Yet not without danger; for the goddess of spring, who has been scattering bud and burgeon of wild flowers everywhere, has awakened not only harmless wee squirrels and wise-looking mountain rats, but wolves as well, and many an innocent little calf falls a bleeding victim to their ferocity, bravely though the mother may try to defend them. Yes, and oftentimes die in defending them. Her carcass then becomes a prey to the wily fox, to the yelping coyote, and swooping eagle.

But spring has awakened a far more formidable animal, — the grizzly bear. But from the cave in which he has been slumbering, snowed up all the winter, gaunt, bony, and fierce crawls he now. He yawns as he gazes sleepily around him. Yawns and stretches himself. Yet so hungry is he that he will gladly devour even the rattlesnake, which basks yonder on the sun-heated rock. Ah! but he is in luck, for a deer comes by, all unconscious that death, in the shape of that fearsome grizzly, is anywhere so near.

Next moment, the agile creature is seized by the neck or shoulder; the bear is growling and spluttering now, and the blood, in little jets and fountains, is "scirping" in all directions.

But autumn comes.

The leaves on the trees are crisp and sear; brown, crimson, or yellow. There is a cooler, clearer, and more bracing atmosphere now. Rain falls; the grass, burned almost into hay by the fierce heat of the summer's sun, gets greener. Antelopes and deer browse here, there, and everywhere. There are bears on the mountains; there are mallards on every creek and stream; there are ravens hovering over carcasses of defunct cattle, and they croak and rustle their hard wings as they tear and swallow the putrid flesh.

Flocks of geese now go southward, and many species of wild birds, the song of which was so sweet and beautiful, follow their example.

The puma, too, or mountain lion, loves the sunshine of warmer climates, though he likes it not too hot. He seeks the solitudes of southern forests in autumn, and, hiding in darkling pines, is a nightmare to many a wandering deer.

Wilson Webb takes his place now, like an old hand, among the cowboys who seek the plains to "cut out," or assist in a round-up. He has even learned the cowboy's wild shriek or yell, as he goes madly dashing eastwards. It is all so very exciting.

We have no English sport to be compared with it.

Talk about fox-hunting, why, it is tame in comparison.

And what English fox-hunter, I wonder, would care to ride a buck-jumper? Yet the successful management of even these unruly steeds, had been part and parcel of Wilson's cowboy education.

In their cave on the moorland in far-off England our younger heroes read with delight a letter describing Wilson's first experience with a buck-jumper, and after she had heard it read, Leebie's bonnie eyes sparkled.

"Oh," cried the brave little maid, "I'm sure I should like to try a buck-jumper myself!"

"I got on right enough, dear boys," ran the epistle. "I had patted the beast before I mounted, and whispered something in his ear. I had often noticed the cowboys doing this, but didn't know what they said.

"What I said, boys, was this: 'You dear, delightful old buck-jumper, I love you lots more than I can tell you. But we'll get on ever so much better if you don't buck-jump with me. There's a darling.'

"Well, lads, my buck-jumper simply threw back his ears, and showed a good deal more of the whites of his eyes than I cared to see.

"On I vaulted, and away we went. 'Oh,' I said to myself, 'it is going to be easy sailing, after all,' and I patted my steed on the neck, as we raced pleasantly over the plain.

"But the darling suddenly changed his mind, and

stopped so suddenly that I found myself on his neck, in front of the saddle, anyhow.

"‘You’ve got to go off,’ he seemed to say; ‘and the quicker you are about it, the better I shall be pleased.’

"I got into the saddle immediately again, stuck the rowels into his side, and being very angry, brought my whip down on his neck and ears, as hard as I knew how to.

"He tossed his head vengefully, from side to side, and screamed like an equine demon.

"His next motion showed considerable skill, though I hardly know how it was effected. One thing, however, was patent enough to me, and that was the result; but he seemed to bring his fore and hind feet close together, and arched his back, then straightened suddenly out again, like half a hundredweight of whalebone.

"There was a pale half-moon in the sky, the leavings of last night, so to speak, and I flew up towards it; so high, indeed, that I was just thinking of grasping one of its horns, when down I came again, flop, into the saddle.

"It did, indeed, hurt.

"But I was no sooner down than I was up once more, and no sooner up than I was down, and each descent was more painful than the last.

"Then the brute, seeing he could not unship me in this way, tried new tactics. He went whirling round and round and round, and finally, when he

seemed to know that my brain was all upside down, with one wild, triumphant scream he tossed his hind legs high in the air, and over his head I flew.

"I alighted on my broad back, lads, with my head to the golden west and my legs pointing to the moon, and my steed, who had now quite recovered his complacency, went trotting after the boys, the most contented and good-natured beast I had ever seen during my long and checkered career.

"I am sitting on a cushion of soft hay, as I write these lines, and I do not think there is much chance of my riding even my own broncho for days to come."

CHAPTER XII

IT WAS A TERRIBLE FIGHT WHILE IT LASTED

"Hark! That thrilling awful sound;
It is the lion's roar." — ANON.

AUTUMN, with its mournful days and moaning winds, passed away, and oftentimes the sky was dark and overcast, and showers of sleet-like clouds of Scottish mist went whirling along the mountain sides.

Though the puma has gone south and south, and all the migratory song-birds have fled or flown away; though the rattlesnakes bask no longer on grey rocks or clay, and the bears have gone to sleep in caves high up the hills, the deer have become far tamer, and are found not far from the foot-hills and in herds, browsing on whatever Providence has spared them. There are plenty of mallards still to be shot, however, and so Wilson Webb gets good sport — sport that helps to eke out provisions, too. And those birds will remain here as long as there is open water.

High up the stream where the current was strong, forming many a rapid and cataract, and farther down, perhaps, ceasing to flow entirely and forming a beautiful, brown, fish-haunted pool, the great otter loved

to live and dwell when summer days were fine, and eke in autumn, too; but now he, too, came down the river.

Then fell the first snow, and one morning when Wilson opened the door of his shanty, the world was robed in white. The flakes had ceased to fall for a time, however, and the sun was shining on the dazzling plain—shining from rifts of sweetest blue; yet far in the east, from which the wind came moaning and mourning, black-blue clouds were lumped along the horizon. And had he been a better plainsman than he yet was, these would have told him that a storm was brewing.

Wilson had already had breakfast. But he now put on his cartridge belt, flung a kind of blanket poncho round him, shouldered his rifle, and started off towards the foot-hills. He was promising himself a shot at something. He hoped, indeed, to come up with some of the grey wolves that he knew, from the mournful, wailing howls which he had heard all night long, were scouring the plains in search of food.

He could not find their tracks, however. These had, no doubt, been covered up by the falling snow. So he wandered on and on, still hill-wards, until he had put fully three miles betwixt him and the town.

Suddenly he stopped.

Here were footprints, not far from the bank of the stream, which, although he had never seen on snow before, he knew must belong to the puma, or American lion — *Felis concolor*.

The footmarks were very big and round, so that it was evident enough that the beast must be a large one — probably five feet in length.

Wilson's pulse began to beat more quickly now; he felt something of

"The stern joy that warriors feel
In foemen worthy of their steel."

He knew, or he thought he knew, the natural history of the American lion well. The plainsmen, or cowboys, professed to have but little fear of it. This terrible cat, they had told him, would attack calves or sheep, slay them, and suck their blood, but invariably fled from man. This may be true enough as regards the beast in summer time; but a half-starved puma in winter is a different kind of animal. He may have had nothing to eat for a day or two, and to drink the blood of a human being, and devour a portion of his flesh would mean life to him.

Anyhow, Wilson Webb looked to his rifle, and determined to follow up the tracks.

Sometimes these led him quite away from the river; at other times they took a circuit and brought him back thereto. It was evident the lion was on the hunt for something to satisfy his hunger. But now Wilson approached a thick willow wood, and here the trees were high.

The light shone here and there in bright, confusing patches, but on he went — more slowly now.

Suddenly right ahead of him and high up he heard

a coughing bark or roar. It was part of both, and it was evident enough that the huge beast with the yellow, fierce eyes had made up his mind to give him battle.

It was bad for Wilson that the sun was in his eyes, making it almost impossible to fire with precision.

He determined, therefore, to make half a circuit, and so alter things to his advantage.

Whether or not the puma now imagined that the man was about to beat a retreat, I cannot say; but with a very startling yell that considerably shook the young man's nerves, he sprang from the tree and advanced, creeping, crouching, fearsome.

Wilson fired at once. That he wounded the puma the cry of rage and pain told him plainly enough, but hardly had he succeeded in drawing his bowie-knife before the beast was at him, on him.

He fell; he below, the lion above, its hot breath blowing in his face, its warm blood spurting all over him. For Wilson had struck out again and again with desperation, and every blow, luckily for him, told.

The brute had seized his poncho, and this probably saved the hunter's throat or face.

It was a terrible fight while it lasted, but soon, to his joy, the puma slackened his hold and slid down by his side—dead, on the brown blood-sprinkled snow.

It took Wilson some considerable time to recover his breath and his *sang-froid*. Indeed, so hot was he that

he was fain to stretch himself on the snow, not far from the dead lion.

He lay thus for a considerable time; then making perfectly sure that the beast was dead, he quietly proceeded to skin it.

He was quite an adept at this sort of thing, and very soon the carcass was denuded of its jacket.

"I wish," he said half aloud, "that I had not made so many holes in it. I have almost spoiled the skin."

So busily and intently engaged at his work was he, that not until he had finished did he observe that the clouds had banked up, and hidden the sun and that the air was filled with falling snow.

This was not the worst; the wind had risen and came moaning from the east in fitful gusts and the temperature had fallen considerably.

He must make all haste to get back homewards. He was determined, however, not to lose the splendid skin. Such a trophy was well worth preserving. So he made it up in a roll, which he was just about to fasten to his girdle when he heard a blood-curdling, wailing howl, that, brave as he was, caused his heart to almost stand still.

Right well did he know what it was. The wild grey wolves had scented blood, and were bearing down upon him in a pack. There was not a moment to lose. So, still holding on to that roll of skin and to his rifle, he seized a branch and quickly drew himself up into a good-sized tree.

For a time, at all events, he was safe. The wolves would scatter and go onward, he told himself, as soon as they had finished the carcass of the puma.

There were thirty of them, at least, tall and fierce and grey, and the way they snarled and fought over the flesh told Wilson Webb that terrible, indeed, would be his doom, if, by any accident, he should fall into their clutches.

But they had finished at last, and now surrounded the tree, lifting up their voices in hideous shrieks and wailings.

They could not climb, it is true; but they had sense enough to spring, and they knew, too, that if they took a short race to it, the leap would be higher.

More than once, then, a huge monster sprang so high that he had all but seized the brave hunter by the foot. This was a species of danger he could not have foreseen.

Why not climb higher up into the tree? one may ask. Simply because the branches would scarcely have borne his weight, or they might have bent to it, letting him fall into the very midst of the howling pack, when short, indeed, would have been his shrift.

He hung the skin higher above him, however, and reloading his rifle, took aim and fired. The wolf he struck fell, uttering the most piercing yells, and his companions not only speedily put him out of his misery, but tore him limb from limb.

Wilson found now that he had but few cartridges in his belt, and determined to save them.



THEY SURROUNDED THE TREE.

But how bitterly cold it had suddenly become! How thick the snow! how wild the wind! He had heard of the blizzards that often swept over these plains and foot-hills, even in early winter, and undoubtedly this was one of them.

Could anything save him from the death that seemed so imminent? He must soon be numbed, thoroughly numbed, and then he should fall from the tree, half-frozen, into the very centre of that pack of waiting wolves. Even they seemed to feel the terrible cold, and now huddled close together or lay on top of each other in a heap.

* * * * *

A whole hour must have gone past, but still the storm raged on.

He had somehow become regardless, by this time, as to what his fate might be. At times he caught himself nodding, and twice he saved himself from falling only by an extreme effort of will power.

Half asleep, half dreaming as he was, a happy thought, which was almost an inspiration, now crossed his mind. Luckily he had brought with him a rope, or lariat, and so, with half-frozen fingers, he proceeded to make himself fast to the stem of the tree, as many a poor sailor does, at sea, to the rigging of his tempest-tossed barque.

He felt comparatively safe after this.

But the intense cold had taken terrible hold of his heart and brain.

Presently, he seemed to be in the tree no longer.

He was far away in Merry England. He was on the moor, on the children's prairie land, and they were near him, all merry, happy, and gay.

It was, indeed, a beautiful dream!

But, ah, me! such dreams do often usher in cold death itself.

Wilson's head had dropped forward on his chest, his cheeks were covered with ice, his hair was matted with frozen snow.

And, oh! the wind, the wind! How bitterly, how mercilessly, it blew!

His feet were already, to all intents and purposes, dead, and death was creeping nearer and nearer to the heart itself; but long before it should reach it, all would be over.

* * * * *

About ten o'clock on that same day, Nate Buster had occasion to call at Wilson's shanty, and Tweed went with him. The blizzard was just then beginning to blow and roar like wild beasts in the far distance.

When the young man's landlady told Nate that he had left two hours before, with his rifle across his shoulder, and had taken his way towards the foot-hills, for a few moments Buster seemed completely taken aback.

"Oh, my poor English friend!" he cried. "We will never, never see him more."

But it was a time for action, and if anything could be done, Nate was just the man to attempt it.

He quickly now flew from house to house to tell the sad tidings, and in fifteen minutes' time, ten bold horsemen were speeding westwards as quickly as the blinding drift and snow would permit.

But there was soon nothing to direct them, and hope itself seemed to sink in every heart. But see, what is that on ahead, feathering through the snow? Why, it is honest Tweed, and he can be but dimly seen, so thickly is he coated with snow.

The men can only talk in signs, but the doctor and Nate are both pointing towards the dog. He is taking the wrong direction, apparently, but yet they determine to follow him.

On and on and on.

And now, from far ahead of them, comes the wailing, sobbing sound of a pack of wolves. Tweed answers it with defiant barks, and hope settles down once more in every breast. But suddenly all sounds cease. Even the dog seems puzzled now, and for a whole half-hour runs hither and thither aimlessly.

The men are just thinking of giving up the search. So terrible is now the blizzard, that they begin to doubt whether their snorting, gasping horses will be able to carry them home again.

But, see! Tweed is once more on the trail, and barking anxiously, joyfully. On they speed again, and very soon they reach the wood, and are close to the pack of half-frozen wolves.

A volley is fired into their very midst, and so closely are they huddled together, that many are

killed and many more crawl off wounded, to perish afterwards in the snow.

But where is Wilson? Can the wolves have devoured him?

No, for Tweed, with his nose in the air, is barking joyfully up at the tree.

Nate himself and the doctor — both are young and active — are soon up. The lariat is loosened, and Wilson Webb's half-frozen body lowered to the ground.

But some attempt to bring him round must be made before the start, else they would reach the city of shanties carrying a corpse.

So a kind of shelter from the cutting blast is speedily formed, and the men take turns in rubbing and chafing the seemingly dead man's limbs and body. And soon they have the intense satisfaction of hearing him moan as if in pain.

Presently he opens his eyes and smiles faintly.

"Saved!" cries Nate. "God in heaven high be praised!"

"Saved! yes, saved!" cries the doctor.

Then he puts a flask to Wilson's lips, and bids him sip and swallow.

And soon he is so far revived that with a little support he can sit up.

He gazes around him for a few moments bewilderedly, but he seems to know both Nate and the doctor. He nods and smiles and tries to speak. But his lips are still half frozen and powerless.

"The poo-hoo's sh-sh-shin!" he mutters more than once.

The doctor shakes his head.

"The poor fellow is raving!" he says.

But Wilson evidently refuses to admit that he is not sensible enough.

"Waving!" he says. "No, no, no. No t'all. The poo-hoo's sh-shin. Must 'ave poo-hoo's shin."

It is Tweed himself who solves the riddle, with that marvellous instinct which only dogs possess.

With a sharp, impatient bark he jumps up, and going a few yards away, commences scraping and snuffing in the snow.

In a few moments he has dug up and dragged forth a hideous red and fleshless skull. It is that of the puma.

Tweed carries it towards poor Wilson, and lays it ceremoniously by his side.

"I have it! I have it!" cries Nate now. "Our English friend has killed and skinned the puma, and is trying to tell us to bring along the skin.

"The poo-hoo's shin," he added, "means the puma's skin."

Wilson nodded and smiled.

"Away, good dog, and fetch!" cries Nate, and speedily the skin is found.

But that march homeward was, indeed, a terrible struggle and test of the strength and endurance of these hardy cowboys and their horses.

They reached the town at last, and Wilson, still more dead than alive, was put to bed, and only the most careful nursing for three days and three nights, during which time Nate hardly ever left the room, sufficed to bring him round at last.

CHAPTER XIII

THE GREAT SPRING "ROUND-UP"

"See, Winter comes to rule the varied year." — THOMSON.

SNOW and ice! Ice and snow everywhere!

The stream has narrowed and narrowed till it is now but a dark and winding thread, meandering between its banks of dazzling white. The birds—mallards—remain but a little longer now; for they have wings that can bear them south and away to a land where there is open water,—a land where, though rain may fall heavily, the glorious sun shines many times and oft, his warm beams not shorn by the frost. Happy birds!

But here it does not always snow. For there are days of exceeding brightness when the sun, like a silver shield, sails along in a sky of cloudless blue and is reflected from plains of dazzling white; and nights when the moon is so clear one can see to read by its light. Night and silence, save for the mournful cry of the grey wolves that in small packs may even be seen at times scouring the plains in search of food!

But it is the cattle and horses that Wilson Webb pities most now. True enough, they have been pro-

vided by nature with a winter coat of long, thick hair, but even this hardly suffices to withstand the wintry blast, and they shiver as they are huddled together in groups or try by scraping to reach the benevolent bunch-grass. It is the want of proper sustenance that is worst of all to bear. Had they plenty of forage, plenty to eat, the blood would not be so thin and poor and they would be defiant of the heaviest storms that could blow.

Last autumn the best and fattest of the flocks were, of course, driven away to the Eastern markets; so these poor beasts are the poorest, and many cows succumb to the weather and lie dead in the midst of their fellows. Here is a feast for the howling wolves and for the black and croaking raven, that loves to stain his rough grey beak with blood or carrion.

But Wilson is not surprised to find that the wind, which goes wildly sweeping across the hills, drives before it the powdery snow, often filling up the ravines with drifts and often burying beasts alive. But this very wind, in other ways, helps to keep the poor brutes in life; for they can find grass on the hills it has swept bare.

Should a slight thaw come,—and this often happens,—succeeded by a harder frost than ever, the cattle may become encrusted or caked with ice. They often lose all heart then, care not to feed, become paralysed, and just lie down to die.

Wilson Webb was young and very strong, and he gladly assisted the boys now in their long, wild rides

across the ranges to do what they could for the cattle.

More than once they were caught in terrible blizzards, and glad, indeed, and thankful were they when they managed to escape with life. They were not all invariably so lucky. One or two poor fellows even, with their horses, had sunk to rise no more. And were no more seen, indeed, having mistaken the route and wandered far, far away in the wrong direction. No more seen, I mean, until the spring "round-up," when their bodies would be discovered, — poor Luke or poor Joe, — mayhap at the side of some little bank where, in vain, they had sought for shelter, or at the bottom of some rocky cañon over which they had been hurled, when the blinding, choking, remorseless blizzard was at its very worst.

Did Wilson suffer? No, he was strong and wiry, and really loved adventure for its own sake. He was waxing hardier and hardier too, and fitting himself, though he did not know it then, to undergo the hardships and rigours of a country far wilder and rougher than even this.

Wilson might have been called a "tenderfoot" when he first arrived in the country of the cowboy. He was very far, indeed, from being a tenderfoot now.

Just look at him this afternoon, and that may be almost any stormy afternoon, as he alights from his broncho at the saloon door after a long wild ride. Boys come out to meet him, and though drowsy still,

he tries to smile, but his moustache is caked with ice and his lips feel frozen. There is ice on his eyelids, and ice on his cheeks — a very mask of it.

But he hands his horse to a boy, doffs his hat and shakes it, and after another boy has swept him down with a willow broom, he enters.

Hot enough in here, in all conscience, and he soon thaws. The landlord places before him a huge mug of fragrant coffee. Lizzie brings him biscuits, and soon he is his own old self once more.

Lizzie brings him something else a few minutes after this.

The child is a favourite of his as well as of the good doctor, and really she has many very engaging ways about her.

She fetches his fiddle-case. He looks at it and looks at her. Then he looks at his left hand and blows upon his fingers.

"Well, dear, if I must, then I suppose I must," he says.

There are many boys here. They have been playing poker, lounging around and smoking, but they prepare to listen, and Wilson's music really enthalls them.

They beg of him to play this, that, or t'other, their favourite airs; that is, tunes that bring back to them scenes long since passed and gone, songs that their mothers or sisters used to sing in the days when they were very young, very romantic, and somewhat wild. Days when they thought there must be no life so

free and joyous as that of mounted cowboy, with his broad hat, his lariat, his strange boots and "chaps," his knife and his guns.

Yes, for among the boys that lounge here by the counter, their eyes fixed upon the performer, there is more than one gentleman's son, young men from the East who even now might be enjoying all the pleasures and comforts of luxury and refinement in their happy homes so far away.

No wonder that one or two of them, as Wilson plays, lift their hands to their faces to dash away the tear they would feel ashamed their comrades should see.

That violin of his brought Wilson Webb a fair share of popularity, and I believe I am not going too far when I say he had not an enemy in the whole town. But there was another reason for this; he never gambled nor played poker. Had he not seen enough of the gambling fiend in the old country to last him a lifetime?

Well, once more winter wore away, and preparations were now commenced for the great "round-up," that takes place every spring.

This was for the branding of the calves, and intensely exciting work it proved.

Work for men, real men; work at which your cowardly queen's hound followers of England would fail in half a day.

But in spring takes place what is called the calf round-up, and this not until the calves are big

and strong enough to stand the branding. In the free-grass round-up, the cowboy is said to be seen at his very best; for in this, all the wild cattle have to be collected, headed away and away till they are brought together in one immense herd, and then comes the counting of them, the separating, and the identification and claiming, each owner having his own brand.

The skill, the ingenuity, and courage that are displayed in this round-up is nothing short of marvellous.

There are many spring or calf round-ups in a free-grass country, often a dozen and more, and the owners have to go shares in the expenses. Each district has, of course, its head man, or boss, whose duties are by no means light, nor free from responsibility.

Well, this particular spring promised to be very fine.

"We never have seen finer grass," said the *Independent*, "nor friskier, happier nags, and we are willing to bet our best and latest printing machine to a new hat, that the summer is going to be a fine one."

These words were printed in the bold editor's second edition, and he thought fit to give one or two warnings at the same time. He put these in words that it would have been difficult to misunderstand. "There are one or two softies," the article ran, "who haven't yet paid their last subscription. One of these is Bill Wickens; another is that mutton-headed galoot, Joe Farnley. We mean to lay for the pair of them,

and when we have shot an ear off each, they will pay up, and save the other one. Last fall there were some rustlers about on the range. These cattle-thieves did a good thing by their drive, and took away more fat beasts than our fellows could spare. We give them fair warning that if they come again in August, we shall prepare for them some special graves, and we shan't bury them too deep, either; for as a wild winter generally follows a fine season, it is only fair that the grey wolves and the ravens should have a square meal. Rustlers, beware! We happen to know that these lines will be seen by the cattle-lifters, for our *Independent* finds its way into every part of the known world, and the British queen of England would not sit down to her Sunday's breakfast — which is more nutritious than that of a week-day — were the *Independent* not placed beside her plate. Now, God speed you, merry, merry cowboys all, and hurrah! for the spring round-up."

As Wilson had never before been at any such great meeting, he found quite a deal to wonder at, and his letters home to Leebie and the boys filled them with delight and envy.

Of course, he took his camera with him. In fact, he never went far without it, and had already made quite a collection of interesting views of everything connected with life on the ranch, on the range, or in the city of "*We're-all-here*" itself.

"You'll have some real hard riding," Nate told him one beautiful evening early in May.

"Yes," said the Doc., "and if you're going to go in for the sport in good earnest, you will need five extra horses."

"Five extra horses!"

"Yes; we'll all have that, and more."

"And," continued Nate, "mebbe, as we've got to meet boys from all quarters, although you may take your guns, you'd best keep your temper."

"Yes, sirree," said the Doc. "Nate's about right; and if they call you British and a tenderfoot, just laugh. They'll withdraw the insinuations after they've seen ye ride a bit."

Well, the start was made at last, and that very evening they camped out on the plain. It happened to be a moonlight night, and very clear and bright was the sky. Very pretty, too, looked the tents and the flickering mess-fires; waggons here, and waggons there, and little herds of horses. But what struck Wilson most was the methodical and business-like way, in which every matter of detail was arranged and carried out. This particular outfit might have consisted of somewhat under forty men, including the chief cow-puncher, captain or boss, and his lieutenant, who knew to a nicety the tricks and manners of every man Jack there, and what they were fit for. On the whole, the band was like a little army on the war-path.

Early-to bed was the order of the day, or rather of the evening. And soon there was little to be heard around the camp, except the sea-like moans of the

dreary wind, or the mournful cry of owl or yelp of coyote hovering near the camp.

Wilson slept so soundly that when awakened at length by the shout of the lieutenant ordering all hands to roll out, he could scarcely believe the day had, indeed, begun.

But he was hungry and he was as fresh as the wild flowers. Good signs both.

There was a stream at no great distance, and with Nate's collie Tweed bounding by his side, he mounted his broncho and rode off to have a swim.

How delightfully cool and refreshing was that bath, and I feel sure the nag enjoyed it quite as much as his master or the dog, either.

Breakfast!

Saddling!

Striking of tents and horsing of waggons! Up and away!

Every little corps or band has its orders; every one knows his duty, the portion of the plain to scour, the cattle to head, and the final place of meeting.

Much art, if, indeed, I might not call it science, is displayed in herding the wild and scattered cattle to the meeting-place. It is hard and tiring work, too, especially on that first day, before the cowboys have been hardened or set as it were to their work.

What a babel it is! With the shouting of the cowboys whirling here and whirling there, sweeping and floating round and round in every attitude of grace and wild beauty imaginable; the neighing of

the little horse herds; the lowing and moaning of the frightened cattle, and their still more frightened calves!

And what dust and heat over all the apparently chaotic scene!

But it is not chaos, and soon the work of cutting out commences; for each mother with her calf has to be separated from the general herd, the latter to be branded with the hot irons, with the brand of the mother.

The work is terribly hard, and Wilson Webb, who has his own duties to perform and is, in fact, now a cowboy to all intents and purposes, finds that he must mount another horse every time he goes into the herd.

And these horses or ponies really appear to be as wise as their masters.

A tally must be kept of every cow and calf thus driven clear of the general herd.

Then comes the curving in the air of the long rope or lasso. It swirls around the cowboy's head, like a living, writhing thing, but with lightning speed; it now spins through the air, and a calf is roped and thrown.

Next comes the branding; necessary, of course, but painful and cruel on the whole. The poor moaning mother can hardly be kept away.

"Oh, be gentle! Be gentle, boys!" she seems to cry, and when at last her dazed offspring staggers to her side, her display of affection, as she gently licks the tender part, is really more than human.

Well, when the first day's work was over, Wilson—and there were many more like him—felt little inclination to do anything else except eat and sleep.

He was tired and made no attempt to hide it; but it was a wholesome, happy tiredness.

His was a dreamless, solid slumber that night, and every night during the whole round-up.

But he had gained strength every day, and after the return of the cowboys, he got out his fiddle, which was always left in the charge of little Lizzie, and the lads had such a dance as was seldom to be witnessed, even in the city of "*We're-all-here.*"

CHAPTER XIV

ON THE WAR-PATH

"Over the prairie, wild, bleak and wide;
The foe is ahead — and we ride, and we ride,
Our steeds flecked with foam — but, see! they're in sight!
Steady! men, steady! — and now for the fight."

THE fiercely hot summer passed on and away, and then preparations were made for the beef round-up. Yet hot though the summer had been, it was not, strange to say, a dry one. So the grass had been abundant; and the cattle, on inspection, were found to be in fine condition, and quite fit to be driven off to Northern or Eastern markets or railway stations.

Whether the *Independent* had or had not so large a circulation as bold Mr. Whetstone was pleased to claim for it, I am not prepared to say. And to his assertion that Her Majesty the Queen would refuse her Sunday-morning meal, did not this somewhat high-flavoured and greasy sheet flank her plate of liver and bacon, I think the editor was drawing the long bow. Anyhow, his warning to the rustlers, or cattle thieves, proved all in vain; for one evening, as Wilson and the Doc. were enjoying a pipe on the verandah of the saloon, little Lizzie, as usual, on the medico's

knee, the trampling hoofs of a galloping horse could be heard coming nearer and nearer, and presently Nate himself pulled his dust-stained, perspiring nag right on his haunches beside them.

"Doctor," he cried, "and you, Webb! Up, men! up! and help me to rouse the camp and city. The rustlers have been onto us. The dog-gone thieves and scoundrels have cut out and got away, with a whole drove of our beefiest and best."

Here was news, indeed; and the whole of the city of "We're-all-here" was speedily aroused and preparing for action.

"This is to be a fight to the death, boys," said Whetstone; "though dying in any ordinar' way is a dang'd sight too good for those durned rustlers. Well, ye can't say that we ourself, in the cols. of the *Independent*, didn't give you warning. I takes the command in person, therefore, of this 'ere expedition, and I appoints Nate Buster, Wilson Webb, and the brave Doc. here my chief officers. Take your tools, Doc., for we mean business, and you'll have bullets to extract on our side, as well as men to kill on the other."

The cowboys raised a cheer, and the very horses held their heads on high, as if they knew they were going on the war-path, and in imagination sniffed the battle from afar.

The cowboys were now drawn up in line for inspection; for nothing must be forgotten. Stores of ammunition must be taken, as well as stores of food.

Then the men were ordered to dismount, and while the bronchos were feeding, they had their final meal and their final drink.

Then good-byes were said to those to be left behind, and the order was given to "mount and ride."

This was to be an adventure out of the common. Wilson Webb felt sure enough of that, though he could not have foreseen how grimly it was going to end.

The days were still very long, and, moreover, there would be a round moon shining all night long, in a cloudless, greenish-yellow sky.

After they had ridden about ten miles, the sun having gone down behind the grand old sierras in a dazzling orange haze, they dismounted by the banks of a stream, where the horses could drink and graze for half an hour.

Then the stream was forded, and on they rode once more. But Nate, who was riding on a little way ahead, his object being to fall in with the trail of the rustlers, had humanely lifted Tweed, and held him on the saddle in front of him, else the poor fellow would have been exhausted.

Although, before encamping for a few hours' rest, they did come upon the trail, which was so distinct that a baby could have followed it, the rustlers had at least two days' start of them, and so it would take some time to come up with them—if ever they did.

Supper was speedily cooked and served. Yes, and eaten with that hearty appetite which the cowboy

● abroad on the plains never wants. Then down they lay, and, rolling themselves in ponchos or rugs, were soon fast asleep.

Although given to boasting a little at times, there was not a much smarter man anywhere about than Whetstone. He dearly loved activity, and his men had not slept over four hours when he was in their midst once more.

"Roll out, boys! roll out! Up and away! We'll give these rustlers beans before another sunset."

They watered their horses at a pond not far on along the trail. In or near this pool were the carcasses of no less than two fine horned cattle torn and disembowelled by the coyotes. The poor beasts seemed to have dropped dead even as they stooped to drink.

"Well," said Nate, "this proves, anyhow, that the dog-goned rustlers are putting a foot in it. They are goin' fast enough to bust any ordinar' cattle!"

"We'll soon bust them," said Whetstone, grimly.

"As for me," said the doctor, "I'm just spoilin' for a fight."

On and on for seven long miles, and just as the sun was illumining the clouds far away in the east, they halted near a wood to breakfast. Never, surely, had a morning meal been more hardly earned. Never, certainly, was one done more ample justice to.

But Whetstone permitted the whole of his little army to have an hour and a half's rest.

"We might come up with the blessed cattle-thieves

at any moment men, and tired men don't have a show in a hand-to-hand fight.

"Look to your guns now, lads," he said, before they started. And every one obeyed.

"Nate, the ground is getting hilly and woody. I don't like to risk going too close to those clumps of trees all at once. Just be the scout, will you?"

"Gladly," said Nate, and, still holding the dog in front of him, on he rode.

But no enemy appeared that day.

Nate climbed a highish hill next morning, and, to his inexpressible joy, could see far ahead of him, and near to a small farm, or ranch, a band of rustlers hurrying on a herd of cattle in front of them.

Whether he had been seen or not, he could not tell; but all was excitement in Whetstone's little army of fifteen good men and true, when they saw Nate tearing back towards them, riding as only a true trained cowboy can, and waving his hat in the air.

"Coo-ee! Coo-ee!" he was shouting.

Every man would have ridden at the gallop there and then, but Whetstone was too good a general to permit any such rashness.

He called a halt, and listened to Nate's report with more seriousness than was usually displayed by him.

"And you think they must be nearly twenty strong?"

"I guess they're pretty near."

"Well, boys," said Whetstone, "my own heart's

just a-boilin' over, and I'd like to rush 'em; but we've got to make sure, and we can't be sure and surtain athout bein' cautious."

They went on more slowly now, Nate going ahead again to scout.

He had disappeared round a clump of trees, when suddenly the sharp report of a rifle rang out on the still air, followed by another; and then the scout was seen riding back in all haste.

"We're discovered!" he cried.

"Ay, that we are. I've winged the rustlers' scout, but he was able to ride away."

"Yes, and if we're discivered," said Whetstone, musingly, "they'll fight afore they go farther."

"That's so."

"And bein' so, Nate, it strikes me we'd better hold a council o' war."

This was immediately done.

Several of the party, especially the warlike doctor, proposed going on at once, and delivering an attack in force.

"Because," he explained, "they'll entrench that ranch. Sure to. These rustlers are all cowards; but safe behind an embankment, you'll find they can fire finely, and fight till all is blue."

Wilson Webb was somewhat of the same opinion, but Nate and Whetstone had different ideas, and their plans were carried when put to the vote.

There was to be no hurry, but plenty of caution, and victory — Whetstone said — was certain.

Well, there was still a long day before the men of "*We're-all-here*," so the main trail was deserted, and before two o'clock they had made quite a detour, and were prepared to descend upon the ranch from the opposite side.

It was evident enough that the rustlers had given up all hopes of keeping the stolen cattle, and would now bend all their efforts to saving their own cowardly skins. The cattle were allowed to roam free, therefore, and were browsing and resting quietly after their long, fatiguing drive.

The north and east sides of the ranch were not only hilly, but covered with brush and trees, thus affording excellent cover for the attacking party.

Moreover, the rustlers had made one mistake to begin with, and had spent the whole forenoon in fortifying the south and west aspects of the ranch.

It was not the first time these cattle-thieves had made a raid upon the range belonging to the men of "*We're-all-here*," and so they knew they had but small mercy to expect.

They should, figuratively speaking, be fighting with halters round their necks, and desperate, indeed, would be their resistance.

"If we could only get them out into the open," said Nate to his chief, "small and quick work we'd make on 'em. Anyhow," he added, "we can cut out their horses."

They were just outside and to the north of the ranch buildings.

And they were securely hobbled.

Well, there is nothing like daring; so Nate's proposal was speedily acted on and a rush made. A withering volley was fired as they dashed on, and the defenders, deserting their half-built trenches, took shelter in the log-house itself, firing through the windows.

A badly aimed volley or two, that was all, and it was returned in force by a rattling, well-delivered fire that nothing could withstand.

Meanwhile some of the boys were busy setting the enemy's horses free and driving them away to the woods.

"Come out, you durned rustlers!" roared Whetstone; "and if you'll fight like men, we'll try to give ye fits. But if you feel ye ain't got the grit in you, lay down your arms and I promise that never a hair in your scalps'll be raised till ye interview the sheriff of 'We're-all-here.'"

Another volley from a window was the only reply.

A bullet tore through the editor's best hat, and one of his men fell wounded. In the strong arms of one of his comrades he was borne to the bush, and the doctor followed to bind up his wounds.

Now, when Whetstone had proposed great caution in dealing with the rustlers, he had believed they would have thrown up a trench of some sort on all sides. But now, that they had not, he determined to alter his tactics somewhat. He could either lay

siege to the ranch and starve its garrison into subjection, or he could burn them out.

He chose the latter plan after further consultation with his officers and men.

Luckily for Whetstone's operations, there were no windows anywhere save in front.

He set his fellows, therefore, to cut down brushwood and roll it down the declivity to the back of the house, whence it could easily be carried to the front and piled up against the windows.

The good fellows worked briskly and manfully, and before sunset had made their pile.

But now rest and food were imperative, and it was finally agreed that the main attack should not be made till early morning, when the boys would be fresh and hearty.

Sentries were set, however, and so, not knowing what a day or an hour might bring forth, the cowboys, after feeding and tending to their horses, lay down and, rolling themselves in their blankets, were soon fast asleep.

CHAPTER XV

THE BATTLE — LYNCHED AT THE STAKE

"Revenge is a kind of civil justice." — BACON.

NOTHING occurred to disturb the rest of those brave and weary men, and it still wanted three hours of the dawn when Whetstone awoke them. There was no wild shouting of "roll out! roll out!" The worthy editor simply stepped quietly round, and placed a hand on the shoulder of each.

And, thus awakened, all were soon aware that the time for action had arrived.

The camp-fire was still burning, however; and before starting to work in grim earnest, coffee was made and bread was served out. The cowboys felt like giants refreshed.

Then they were led down to the ranch, where the piles of brushwood lay.

When they saw the very first portion of the pile tossed up against the north window, the defenders began to fear and tremble.

"Fear not, till Birnam wood
Do come to Dunsinane."

But here was Birnam wood coming, and that, too, with a vengeance, — the vengeance of robbed and

wronged men, whom there was no law to protect except the might that, in cases like this, stands for right.

Several volleys were fired from the now blocked windows, but, as they did no harm, they were not even replied to.

The cowboys' fire would come soon enough.

At last the huge piles were completed. The door, however, was left free.

But fire was not applied until broad daylight.

There was but little wind, but little though it was, it blew against the front of the house. So luck was all on the side of the besiegers.

Now came the tug of war, and it was evident to all that the "tulzie" would be a terrible one. The besieged were three times called upon to surrender, and the only answer was a volley of firearms and a volley of taunts and horrid imprecations.

"Fire the brush, now," shouted Whetstone, "and smoke the rats out o' thar tarnation holes!"

Nate himself at one window, and the bold Doc. at the other, fired their pistols into a bunch of dry grass close to the bottom of the piles. The flames leapt upwards in a few little tongues of yellow; the wind caught these, and next minute the whole was alight.

Whetstone now drew off his men a distance of twenty yards, and from this spot they could concentrate their fire upon the door and places near to it.

Though rough and hardened as regards the taking of human life, the editor had a little pity in his heart; for he once more, and finally, asked the army to capitulate to save useless bloodshed. "Never!"

That was the scornful reply, and it was the last they had a chance of making.

There was the cracking of glass now, and the terrible roaring of the fire; for the doomed ranch had caught and would soon be but a heap of ruins.

But now the door is thrown suddenly open and a withering volley is fired before the rush is made. Several of Whetstone's men have fallen, but the reply is a fearful one, and that doorway is almost immediately piled up with dead and with the writhing bodies of the wounded.

The rest of the besieged men now make a break for the wood. There lies their only chance of safety.

But many are tumbled like rabbits in a pine wood, before they reach the friendly shelter, and rushing on after them, the cowboys succeed in making no less than five prisoners. And one of these is the boss rustler, or captain himself.

Being certain that nothing alive can now be inside that red-hot, fiery ranch, Whetstone gives orders for the prisoners to be securely made fast to trees, and for the wounded of the enemy to be hauled away from the doorway, where there was a likelihood of their being roasted alive.

Then he turns his attention to his own poor fellows, among whom the doctor is now busy enough.

But two are already stone-dead, one is dying, and three more are wounded.

Among these latter is Nate Buster himself. A bullet has passed right through his shoulder, severing an important artery, which, however, the doctor has managed to ligature, and thus his life is saved, for the time.

But see who comes yonder. Why, a mere lad, bareheaded, bare-legged, and wearing only a shirt and pants.

He is weeping bitterly.

"Who are you, my boy?" said Whetstone, placing a kindly hand upon his head.

"Oh, sir, I'm little Johnnie Grant. There was only me and fadder and mudder that lived in the ranch."

"Doctor, doctor," cried Whetstone, "in the bustle of battle we have quite forgotten the inmates of the house. They must have been burned alive."

"No," said Johnnie, "not burned alive. Poor ole fadder and mudder was burn'd *dead*."

"Es, sirree, the rustler boss shot 'em bof las' night. Oh, my pore ole fadder! Oh, oh!"

Whetstone was an angry man now.

"Come with me, lad, to the trees, and point out to me the durned snake that slew your parents."

This the boy did.

"That's he, sir," he said, pointing to a broad-shouldered, daring-looking man of about thirty.

The boy had dried his eyes, but at sight of this

fiend in human form, he drew back in terror; then his tears fell faster than ever.

The boss rustler spat defiance at Whetstone, as he drew near.

"You mean, despicable, dog-goned coward!" cried the editor. "Not content with being a thief, you must stain your hands in the blood of a defenceless old man and woman! Have you a single word to say for yourself?"

"No, and I wouldn't to you, if I had. You'll lynch me, I know. But do your dangedest, I've only one life to lose, and it's yours. I've but one favour to ask of ye. Let the rope you hang me with be a strong one. I don't want to trouble you trussing me up twice."

"Hang ye!" cried Whetstone. "Hang a blood-stained, red-fanged wolf like you! You shall receive no such courtesy at our hands. Listen, at one hour before sunrise to-morrow morning, you shall be burned at the stake, and may Heaven have mercy on your guilty soul."

It was evident the sentence was unexpected. The wretch was seen to tremble and strain at his ropes, as if he fain would have burst them and rushed on to some death far less terrible.

Whetstone said nothing to the other prisoners, but, turning on his heel, he walked away.

The charred remains of the old man and his wife were found that evening, and received decent burial. So did the bodies of the dead cowboys. Those of the

enemy were to be left to feed the grey wolves, the ravens, or the coyotes.

But their wounded received as much attention from the kindly Doc. as did his own.

There grew a tall, strong pine tree at some distance from the wood, and around this Whetstone, a short time after sunset, gave orders that the rustler boss should be made fast.

And this was done, I am sorry to have to relate, with barbed wire fencing, a coil of which had been found in an outhouse. Then a huge pile of brushwood was built around the unhappy man, and, thus he was condemned to pass the night, in a state of mental and bodily agony that cannot be described.

This might have been cowboy justice, but it is terrible, indeed, to think of. Just before moonrise Whetstone, considerably mollified, now told the doctor he might, if he chose, send the murderer to sleep.

"Not eternally, Doc. Take care, for the law must run its course, and the blood of Grant and his wife calls to Heaven for vengeance!"

The Doc. took half a bottle of old rye, poured into it a few drops of a brown tincture, and approaching the tree, held it to the man's lips.

"Drink," he said. "You have much to suffer, soon."

"A thousand thanks!" murmured the prisoner.

Then he drank, and speedily his chin rested on his breast. He was sound asleep.

Slowly the day began to dawn. Wilson Webb had

never left poor Nate's side. Nate had nursed him once; it was his turn now.

Surely dogs know something about coming death; for Tweed, poor fellow, was never absent from the very moment his master fell. He seemed wise enough to know that the doctor was doing all he could for his patient; for he watched his every movement, and licked his red hands, and fawned upon him when he had finished.

But he could not be prevailed upon to touch food, although he lapped water readily enough.

The day was dawning, and it was very still. Not a breath of wind rustled through the grass or moaned among the trees. But there had been a slight air of frost, and the bushes were white with rime.

Who dare say that the murderer did not richly deserve his fate? Nevertheless, it was, indeed, a terrible one. Nor do I mean to sully my pages with complete details of the tragedy.

The potion that the doctor had administered the evening before, kept the wretched man asleep till within about two hours of his execution. Then he awoke, while the stars were still shining; awoke cold, shivering, and in pain — for he dared not move, lest those barbed wires should cut into his skin.

He tried to be brave, but his courage seemed utterly to have failed him.

Just once during those long hours, the longest ever he had passed in life, did he speak. It was to his guards.

"Men," he said, "what is the time?"

They told him.

He groaned, but continued as follows: "I have an old mother in Colorado. The prisoners you have secured will give you the address. I was her favourite boy. Yes, blood-stained wretch though I now am, I had and have a mother's love. My dying wish is that you write to her, but tell her not how I died. Say only I took my death like a man, and that my last thoughts were about her."

Before the terrible fire was lit, he was offered another drink. He shook his head and refused it.

Then he must, I think, have gone suddenly mad; for he began to sing Northern songs of the great struggle 'twixt Federals and Confederates, and even when tongues of flame were leaping like fiery snakes up around him, and encircling his limbs, he continued to sing.

The scene was awful, beyond the power of pen or pencil to depict.

Just one terrible yell of pain did he utter as the fire grew hotter and mounted still higher.

Wilson Webb had fled.

The sight was more than he could look upon.

But just a minute or two after he had gone, while the doomed man, with black, swollen face, and starting eyes, was writhing in mortal agony, the crack of a rifle was heard, followed instantaneously by a sound like that which we hear when a bullet hits a far-off target. A spot of blood appeared on the murderer's brow.

Then down dropped the head and chin — he had gone to his account!

When the Doc. and Whetstone looked toward the trench, they could perceive a round, white ball of smoke melting away to leeward in the cool, morning air.

But the fire was kept up until the body was but a blackened scroll, and till bone after bone dropped from the fiery tree.

Then the tree itself bent and bent, till it suddenly fell with a crash, and all was o'er.

CHAPTER XVI

"TWEED, TOO, WAS DEAD"

"Fidelity that neither bribe nor threat
Can move or warp, and gratitude for small
And trivial favours, lasting as life
And glistening even in the dying eye."

— *The Dog.*

A WHOLE month had passed away.

The beef round-up was over, and the far-off markets had swallowed up the beeves, to the no small profit of the hardy owners.

But neither Wilson Webb nor poor Nate Buster had taken any part in that round-up; for Nate was far too ill, and his friend had stayed at home to nurse him.

He was the only patient the good Doc. had, and nursing, he told Wilson, was all he needed.

"And will he ever get well, Doc.?"

This question was not asked in the presence of the languid and prostrate Nate. Wilson knew better than to make any such mistake.

The doctor had shaken his head sadly enough.

"I'm going away to the round-up," he said; "but I shall see Nate alive — never again.

"You must know, Wilson, that Nate's long career

of intemperance has weakened his heart and thinned his blood. I only wonder he has lived so long as he has."

Wilson Webb had come to regard this once wild and reckless fellow, with feelings of almost brotherly affection.

And honest Tweed's regard for his dying master knew no bounds.¹ It was truly wonderful. He had taken to eating again, it is true, but his anxiety to be back by his master's side used to make him hurry through his meal, and often leave the greater part of it in the dish. The dear dog used to begrudge himself even a few minutes' exercise out of doors. Wilson would take him out twice a day, but Tweed went hurrying on, and if any other of his species came up, as in the happy days of yore, to make friends with him, he would pass them almost without recognition, or he would look at them sadly, and seem to say:—

"I am in grief, great grief. Poor master is dying, and I will never, never get another kind friend like him."

As soon as the walk was at an end, and Wilson Webb turned to go back, Tweed started off at a racing speed, and was home long before him, up on to his master's bed, safe in his master's arms.

Some who read these lines may think that instances of affection in the dog, like that which I am so feebly depicting, are rare. They are not, indeed.

I say this, and I who say it know it, that if there

¹ Sketched from the life.

be a God in heaven, and that God has given to man an animal to be his true and loving companion and faithful unto death, that animal is the dog; and one has only to understand him and to love him to be beloved again with a wealth of affection such as exists in the heart of no other creature here below.

My eyes are overflowing with tears as I write, and the lines before me are all a-blur, but they are tears that I am not one little bit ashamed of!

* * * * *

Poor Nate Buster was a good patient, a very quiet and gentle one. I think he knew as well as Wilson did that the end was just a measurable distance away. Yet he never complained, and was thankful for every little favour that was done him.

The weather was still warm, and it was his chief delight during the day to be assisted out to the verandah of the house where he resided. Here was a broad bench, where cushions were placed, and on which he liked to lie.

It faced the west—faced the everlasting hills. Their serrated summits were already covered with snow, and yet, as he told Wilson, they looked so calm and peaceful; then, when lit up with the crimson and blue of sunset, with the ever-changing clouds above, they seemed to waft his thoughts away and away to that brighter and better land to which he felt and knew he was moving. "Some day," he said to Wilson—"some day I will tell you my story; for I have a mother and a sister both, and wild though I

have been, I have never forgotten either. Some day — some day!"

Ah! but that some day never came. On the still, bright evenings, as the sun was slowly sinking behind the snowy sierras, Wilson used to play to him beautiful selections and pathetic from the masters. He would place the mute on the violin bridge, so that the music was lower, softer, and sweeter.

One night after he had finished playing a beautiful impromptu, a kind of lullaby, he happened to glance at Nate.

He seemed peacefully asleep, with one arm over Tweed's shoulders, his brown, thin fingers buried in his mane. And the same red glow that crimsoned clouds and hills lit up his face.

"He sleeps," said Wilson, softly, "and poor Tweed is sleeping also; I will not disturb them!" so on tip-toe he stole away.

Something occurred to take the young man away for fully an hour, but he then hurried back to his patient. He had not moved.

Here I pause, reader, because you can guess what is coming, and I am not the man to try to sketch romantic death-bed scenes. I have seen far too many of them during my checkered career.

That sleep of Nate's was his last long one. Well, perhaps some may think it strange, *I* do not, but *Tweed, too, was dead.*

They buried Nate Buster in a little valley beside a spring; a valley which, save in winter, was nearly

always green; a valley in which the willows grew bonnie, waving silvery buds in the breeze long, long before summer came.

And Tweed was buried by his side.

Little Lizzie, the landlord's daughter, always placed flowers on those graves, whenever she could find them, for Nate and Tweed had been her friends.

Says Pope in his "Essay on Man":—

"Lo! the poor Indian, whose untutored mind
Sees God in clouds, or hears him in the wind;
His soul, proud Science never taught to stray,
Far as the solar walk or milky way,
But thinks, admitted to that equal sky,
His faithful dog shall bear him company."

And why should he not? I ask.

CHAPTER XVII

HURRAH! FOR THE LAND OF GOLD

"Hope, like the gleaming taper's light,
Adorns and cheers the way
And still, as darker grows the night,
Emits a brighter ray." — GOLDSMITH.

WILSON WEBB stayed on among the cowboys all throughout the next winter.

This sort of life had a strange fascination for the young man; and he loved the snow time almost as much as he loved the summer. He was constantly wandering about with his gun on his shoulder and his camera by his side, and he got plenty of sport among the wolves, coyotes, and winter wild fowl. But more than once he had narrowly escaped with his life from being caught in whirling, choking snow-blizzards.

He was studying snow scenes anyhow for his forthcoming lectures, and many of the pictures he obtained were most effective, delicate, and beautiful.

Nor were these winter wanderings of his free from wild adventure. Once, for instance, he was attacked by three hungry grey wolves. After shooting one dead with his revolver, he got his back against a rock and fought the other two with his bowie-knife.

He got the three skins, then made all haste homewards. And he had left the blood-stained snow none too soon, for when only about a hundred yards away he heard the howling of the main pack.

They had come to bury their brothers by devouring them, and had not Wilson got away in time, he, too, would have been buried in the same simple fashion.

Just one bear adventure I must mention because there was a comical element in it, although most certainly Wilson saw no fun about it, at the time.

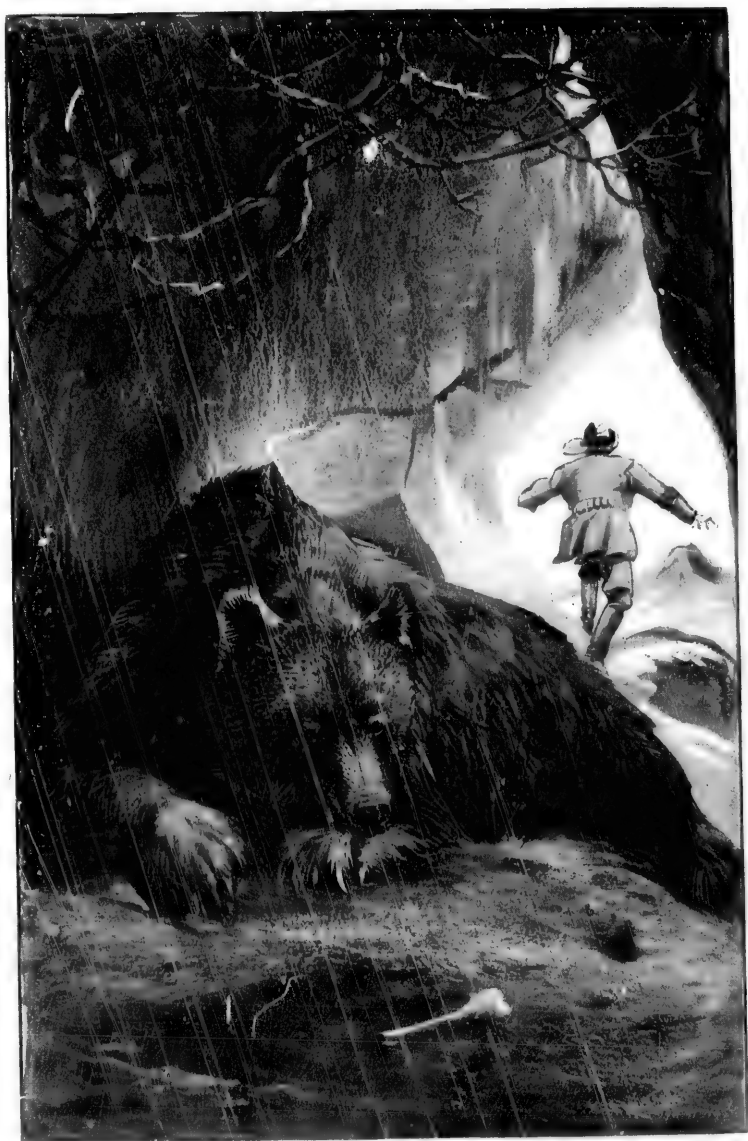
While up high among the foot-hills one beautiful day, the sky to the eastward became suddenly black and overcast, and a blizzard of more than usual violence swept over the plains. The city of "We're-all-here," which but an hour ago he had been admiring, so picturesque did it appear, asleep in the sunlight, was suddenly engulfed in clouds of whirling drift.

Now to be caught in such a fearful storm meant suffocation and death, and right well did Wilson know this. Glad enough was he, therefore, when he found himself close to the entrance of a rocky cave.

He crept in at once. It was very dark and far from comfortable, but—any port in a storm.

The cold was soon so intense, that he was glad to gather the folds of his blanket around him and crouch in a corner.

But here was a mystery. He found himself sitting



NOW WAS HIS TIME, HE THOUGHT, TO MAKE A BOLT FOR FREEDOM.



on something soft—and wonderful to relate, that something was warm.

The truth is he was in a grizzly's cave, and quietly sitting on the proprietor.

The proprietor, however, was very sound asleep, and there was but little chance of his awakening. But poor terror-stricken Wilson was kept moving up and down, like a ship in the doldrums, on the heaving sides of the monster.

For a time he felt like one in a dreadful nightmare, and could not have changed his position to save his life.

So he just breathed a prayer, and sat still. He could never have told any one how long he did sit there.

"A thousand years!" he told the doctor, though this was probably a slight exaggeration.

But all the time the wind without roared and howled, as only blizzard winds among the Rockies can.

Gradually, however, it died, and died away, and soon after not only was it calm, but he could see a streak of sunshine straggling in at the mouth of the cave.

Now was his time, he thought, to make a bolt for freedom. Well, though the bear had kept his body warm, all below the knees seemed paralysed. Would they carry him? If they did not, he would fall and the noise would waken Bruin. Oh, horrible thought! He fancied he heard the crunching of his bones, in the jaws of the awful beast.

Well, fear lends us wings; and presently, when, though still asleep, that great grizzly bear stretched out his paws and uttered a sound, partly groan and partly yawn, that appeared to shake the cave, Wilson sprang to his feet and made a wild dash for the mouth of the cave, paralysed legs and all.

Out he flew, and down he flew. Down the hill running, leaping, vaulting. Nor did he slacken speed until he placed a good long mile 'twixt himself and the cave of that sleeping beauty. "I've never had such a terrible adventure in my life before," he told the boys at the bar that night, "and don't want to be in a bear's bedroom never, never, *never* any more."

He looked very serious, but this only made the boys laugh all the louder, and little Lizzie herself joined the chorus.

* * * * *

"Well, lads," he told them a few months after this, as he put away his fiddle, "the place that now knows me must soon know me no more. I'm going home to get married to the dearest, sweetest lass on earth."

"Hurrah! And every good luck attend ye!"

"We'll miss you, Wilson," said the editor, "and we'll miss your fiddle; mind that, sirree."

"Well, boys," said Wilson, "I must say this: I'll often think of you all and the two years' wild, but pleasant, life I've led among you."

"Shake, Wilson, shake!" cried more than one good-

hearted fellow; "you are true blue, Breetisher though you be."

"Shake, Wilson, shake! I endorses the sentiment."

The Doc. walked home with Wilson that night, and Wilson gave him the easy-chair and one of his very last cigars.

The Doc. lit up, then he nodded over at his friend.

"I'm off too."

"What, *you*?"

"I am. You thought I was settled here for life. But I'm not. I'm only five and thirty, and I want to make a bit o' money because there's a little girl in 'Frisco, and we both want to get hitched.

"Well," he added, "I'm selling my practice. Fact is, it is sold. I had this advertisement in the *News-Letter* for a month and that kind o' fetched my successor."

He handed the newspaper across the table, and Wilson read as follows:—

"Splendid Medical Practice for sale! In a rapidly rising city in M—— County. Close to the foot-hills. Liberal fees from the cowboys. Only a young man need apply. Must have the grit in him. Must ride well and shoot well, be pleasant-tempered and temperate, and able to take his own part and his place also in a 'round-up.' Splendid sport! Bears, grey wolves, pumas, coyotes, wild fowl, and fish, with now and then a rustler or a red Indian. Two thousand dollars clinches the bargain. Present Doc. leaving only 'cause he wants to get hitched."

"So you're going to San Francisco?"

"That I am, and so are you."

"*Me?*" said Wilson.

"Yes. You're coming right along to give your lectures there, and see me hitched."

"Well, 'pon honour, I don't mind, but I really should go home. My poor girl is longing to see me."

"Hush! You are not going back for another year, at least. You have told me that your sweetheart is hardly out of her teens, and that you haven't too much money. But, lad, I'm going to make you rich, and — get rich myself at the same time."

"Inasmuch as to how? Give us the 'whys' and the 'wherefores,' Doc."

"Ever hear of the gold-fields of Klondyke?"

"Just a rumour; all nonsense, I daresay."

"And *I* daresay it isn't."

"Now, you've got sand in you. You're go-ahead and plucky and just about as hardy as they turn 'em out nowadays, and so I say let your cry and mine both be: Hurrah for Klondyke!"

"I'll dream about it," said Wilson, smiling. "I'm not rich, and I must confess that for Madeleine's sake I'd dearly like to be."

And so they parted for the night. Dr. Debrett was a man of method, but a man of bright action as well, and when he made up his mind to do anything he deemed worth doing, he wasn't the individual to let the grass grow up between his toes.

Wilson Webb's lectures were quite as great a success at San Francisco as they were anywhere

else, but he had now taken the gold fever, and to Alaska he must go.

He wrote long letters home. Letters to Peters and his sister; over these poor Madeleine cried a little, but she kissed them over and over again, before she put them carefully away in her little desk. "It is all for your sake, darling," one portion of Wilson's letter ran, "that I wish to make my pile of gold. If all accounts be true, it will not take very long, and then — Oh, you know what will follow, and how quickly I shall hurry home to love and thee!"

Letters to Laurie and Leebie Lea, and a long letter to Ernest Elliot. These letters quite fired the blood of those young fellows. They were sixteen years of age now, remember.

"I say, Laurie," said Ernie, "if I had cash, I'd start off for Klondyke the day after to-morrow."

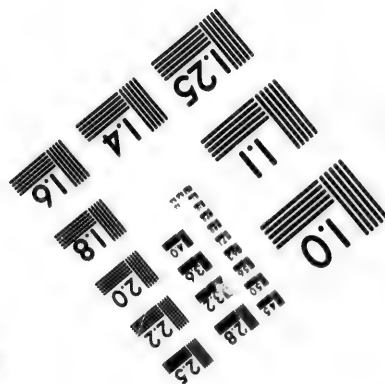
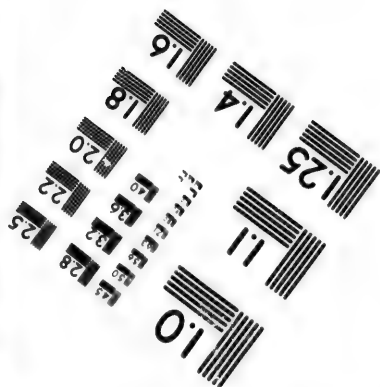
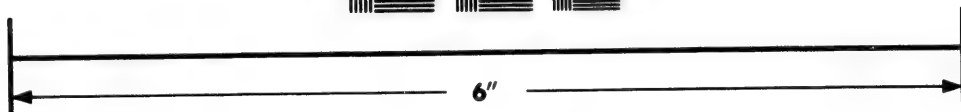
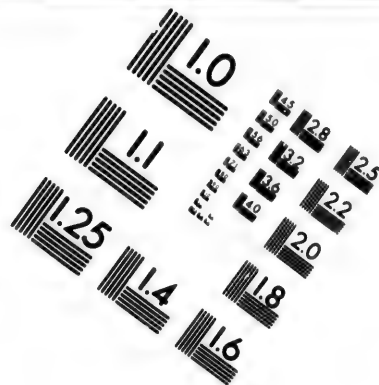
"And so would I!" cried Laurie.

"Oh, Ernie!" exclaimed romantic little Leebie, who was quite as beautiful as ever, — more so, in fact, in Ernest's eyes. "Oh, Ernie, I would go to-night!"

And the two dogs went careering round and round the cave, barking till the rocks rang.

But we must leave these folks for a time, and follow the fortunes of Dr. Debrett and his bride.

She would not be left behind. Other women, she said, had gone out to Klondyke, and why not she? And so she had her way, as the wilful generally do, especially if the wilful one is a woman.



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She was a dark-eyed little girl, — well, woman now, of course, — very piquant and pretty, and with any amount of life in her. In fact, she was just suited to be the companion of a dashing, dare-all man like the Doc.

* * * * *

It took two weeks to get everything ready for the voyage towards the pole.

They were to sail in the end of May in one of a certain company's steamers. The *Hopeful*, as she was called, was by no means a very large boat, and was of American build fore and aft, on deck and down below.

She really seemed to have too much top-hamper to please a British sailor, who never feels quite safe unless the principal weight is all below.

But the *Hopeful* was comfortable, for all that, and very well found, too, and the doctor and Wilson acted well and wisely by paying for provisions enough to last them for a whole year after they should step on shore in the land of gold.

Well, on board the *Hopeful* there was no great crowd of passengers. Perhaps she was a trifle too small to suit a Yankee's ideas of comfort. Nevertheless, among the saloon passengers were some very pleasant people indeed, so that from the very first Mrs. Dr. Debrett did not feel much from home. One, curiously enough, was a white-haired old gentleman of nearly seventy, and his wife, a kindly-faced woman who took a great interest in the Doc. and his

wife. Both were hale and hearty, and the lady did not make up, nor try to hide her age a single bit.

"Ah, my dear," she told Mrs. Debrett one morning at breakfast, "you and your husband are just entering on your voyage of life, but me and my old man'll soon be getting into harbour.

"You may wonder, sir," she continued, addressing the Doc., "what brings an old couple like us here. Well, I'll tell you, and it's mebbe not much credit to us. It is just pride, sir, and nothing else. We come from Chicago, and there we once were rich, but hubbie, he got into a boom; the boom turned out to be a bubble; the bubble burst, and we lost pretty near all. Well, hubbie is still as strong as a horse, and has a heart like a lion. He is as likely as not to live for twenty years yet. But he couldn't stand people in Chicago that were once, as far as the world goes, low down on the ladder of life, turning up their noses at us 'cause we had come down a bit.

"So one morning, 'Margaret,' says he, 'I'm off to Klondyke. Will ye go?'

"'Haven't I always gone everywhere with you, John?' says I. So off we started just a year and a half ago."

"What!" cried the Doc., "have you been out before?"

"That have we, and made a pile too; and we're going back, as you see, to make another."

"And does your husband dig?"

"That he does. But young John — and that is

our son and our only chick or child—does mostly all the hard work. Don't you, young John?"

Young John sat right opposite, giving all his attention to a rump-steak.

A sturdy, broad-shouldered fellow, mild-mannered withal, but just one's beau-ideal of what a Klondyke miner ought to be.

"Of course I do," he replied; "but what was it I did do, mother?"

"And how do you like Klondyke?" asked Wilson.

"Oh, very well," said young John, "bar the dod-rotting skeeters."

"Should have thought it was too cold for them up there," said Wilson Webb.

"Cold, sir! Well, mebbe when they go to sleep they have a bottle o' hot water at their feet. I don't know; only our American skeeters ain't fit to hold a candle to them. They'll come down to meet us at the mouth o' the river, and welcome us all the way up; and if we land on some of the islands there about sunset, you've got to cut your way right through them, with the paddle of the punt. Another chop, steward."

The ship's course was about at north-northwest, and the weather was not only fine, but really beautiful. Father Neptune was kindly disposed towards every one. There really was no seaway to speak of; only light, merry, wee waves that sparkled in the sunshine, and, driven along before a gentle breeze, made the ocean all around look like a mighty Missouri.

Well, the Yankees do believe in good food, anyhow, and in plenty of it, and it did seem to Wilson Webb that the stewards had no sooner cleared away one meal than they began to lay for another.

There was a fairly good piano here. The doctor's wife sang and played; the first mate had a beautiful voice, and so, with the addition of Wilson's Stradivarius, most delightful musical evenings were spent.

As for the skipper himself, and most of the men passengers, though they liked to hear the music, it did not prevent them from playing poker of an evening, or whist itself, although this was not so great a favourite.

But much to the amusement of everybody, the old Klondyke miner and his wife settled down every night, as regularly as the tides, to a humble game of bezique, for six-penny points. This lonesome game they had played together all their lives, and they saw no good and sufficient reason why they should change it now.

The skipper was a thorough Yankee,—at heart, anyhow,—by no means handsome, but affable and always smiling. He tried to do all he could to please everybody, and, truth to tell, he succeeded.

Well, the *Hopeful* was bound for St. Michaels, which, a glance at the map will show you, lies some distance north of the mouth, or rather the many mouths, of the great Yukon. In so long a voyage as this, no one could hope that it would be all fine weather.

Nor was it. The *Hopeful* was no racer even with a fair wind, but when it commenced to blow what the first mate called "a regular sneezer" right in her teeth, the good ship did not half like it, and she made such labouring, heavy weather that the ladies, and most of the gentlemen also, were fain to stop below.

The great seas went fizzing and singing past the ship, threatening and vowing vengeance on all on board. Sometimes a heavier wave than usual would hit the *Hopeful* on the bows with a sickening thud, that made her quiver from stem to stern for a time, and, despite her powerful engines, actually stop dead for a second or two.

But soon the good ship forged ahead once more, presently, perhaps, loading up as it were with a great green sea that she took in over her fo'c's'le,—a sea that went rearing and surging and foaming aft along the decks like the bore that rushes down a Highland river, after a thunder-squall among the mountains. And with terrible force, too, flooding the deck-houses, flooding everything, and carrying with it beef kids, capstan bars, legs of mutton or pork, or anything loose it found in its way.

But the saloon companion had been battened down, so the sea had to steer clear of this.

The *Hopeful* was stronger perhaps than she really looked, and seemed to lose her temper when boarded thus by green seas. She would rise to the occasion literally and figuratively, and soon shake herself clear of the superabundant water.

But this storm lasted but a day and a night. Then in the morning the summer sun shone bright and pleasantly once again over a summer sea; the decks were dry, and all the whiter apparently for their drenching.

A few slight repairs had to be made, for, forward, the bulwarks had been considerably smashed. After this, things went as merrily as marriage bells.

The wind had gone right round to the southward and east; fires were banked, sails were set, and even stunsails low and aloft. It must be stated that this was no ordinary steam tub, but a ship, with steam as an auxiliary power.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE VOYAGE OF THE HOPEFUL

"O'er the glad waters of the dark blue sea,
Our thoughts as boundless, and our souls as free."

— BYRON.

As the ship got more to the northward, the weather became sensibly cooler; but this only in comparison with the fiery south. The sun was still strong; the sea, like the sky, was blue; and so the forenoons, spent on the quarter-deck, over which an awning was always spread, when it could be carried, were pleasant enough.

There were books to read and yarns to be spun by those who had been much to sea, or up Klondyke way, before.

It would not be difficult to fill whole chapters with the strange stories that the first mate told. Perhaps they bordered on the fictitious and romantic, but I do not think they were really much the worse on that account.

Then there were the experiences of old John and young John to be related, and these were very quaintly told, and every bit as true as Johnson's Dictionary.

As they approached the Aleutian Islands, the ship became enveloped in dense, white fogs. Hardly a breath of wind blew now, yet the seas were high, smooth, and rolling almost like the doldrums one falls in with while crossing the line.

These doldrums are far, indeed, from pleasant, no matter where you meet them. Sea-legs are exceedingly serviceable, and will hold you erect while you walk, even in half a gale of wind. But sea-legs are of little use in the doldrums. If on deck, you go sidling about in a most uncertain way. At one moment you may find yourself alongside the starboard bulwarks, and next hanging on to the port belaying-pins, wondering where you have got to skate to next.

When you seek rest, below, you can hardly find it. If there be a coal-scuttle in the saloon, it is sure to meet you in the doorway and get mixed up with your legs, of which you seem to have five and twenty. If there are any footstools, they are certain to trip you up. Most of the small chairs are in the middle of the floor; and the skipper's big easy-chair comes gliding towards you as if it expected you to waltz with it. But who, in all the world, wants to waltz with a skipper's easy-chair?

In despair you fling yourself on a couch. If this couch stands athwartships, you'll be resting on your heels one minute, and standing on your head the next, and if you exchange it for a fore-and-aft sofa, you'll have to pick yourself off the deck in less than a brace of shakes.

"Oh, dear, dear!" you cry in your agony; "the man who goes to sea for pleasure may go to — to a far different place for rest."

But neither the swell nor the fog continued a very long time, although the progress of the ship was considerably interfered with for a time, and the voyage therefore rendered much longer.

Concerning the fogs, the skipper, with whom Wilson Webb and the Doc. were one day walking the quarter-deck, made the following remarks: —

"Ah! gentlemen, this is nothing. Away up in the Bering Sea, where I spent many and many a season at the fur-sealing, the fog was sometimes so dense that it was difficult to see a man five yards away."

"The fur-seal is the sea-lion, isn't it?" said Wilson.

"You're right, young sir; sea-lions, or sea-bears, these seals are called, though I never could tell rightly why, unless it be that they roar just like the African lion, or the great ice-bear, when he's yawning a bit, or stretching himself.

"Well, gentlemen, it is up there they go to breed, season after season, as regular's the tides. But however they can find their way through the dense and terrible mist, to these same Pribylov Islands, has always been a poser and a lick to me. What men o' science call the 'homing instinct,' 'cause they haven't a better name for it, is one o' the mysteries of Providence. Talk about pigeons having this instinct, why, the fur-seal can give them points in everything but speed, and lick them hollow. But

the strange thing is this: after the breeding season on their lonely island is over, they make their way south, living on the fish that the sea everywhere teems with. South and south, to sunny lands, and they may be found all along the coast of Japan, and goodness only knows where all else. Then north again, early in spring, through these fearful fogs that you could cut with a hatchet, unerringly too, till they once more reach their northern home, where the babies are born. What guides them? We sailors just say 'God,' and we say it with some reverence too."

"Are there not terrible cruelties committed at the fur-sealing?" said Wilson.

"Well, in my earlier days there were, but I think it is better now. We didn't use to kill the father and mother lions, but we would get between the sea and the bachelor droves, and just work them inland for a mile or so, like a flock o' sheep, to a kind of slaughter-pens, and then the murder began.

"So many did we kill, too, that if the law hadn't at long last interfered, to limit the massacre, I don't think that by this time there would have been a single fur-seal left alive."

One day something white was reported away on the weather bow, and the course was altered a point or two. It turned out to be a huge, square piece of ice. Snow covered it was, and on a hummock right in the centre stood a huge snow-bear. He was evidently on the outlook for land — which he was destined never to see.

Mrs. Debrett was much interested in the poor beast, and when she heard a boat being called away with a gunner or two —

“Oh, captain, do not send and kill the bear. Indeed, indeed, it is cruel!” she urged.

“My dear lady,” said the skipper, “you must really credit me with having as soft a heart as ever beat in a sailor’s breast, but we are going to shoot that bear to save it from a far worse fate. Already, he is no doubt suffering all the pangs and terrors of starvation. He can never reach shore. His raft will melt from under him; but long before that he would go mad and leap into the sea, only to be torn to pieces by the great sharks,¹ with which the northern seas abound. Don’t you think, then, we are going to do what is best?”

Mrs. Debrett said no more, but went down below.

* * * * *

One bright, sunny morning mountains showed their white heads over the blue horizon, to the northward and west, and it was soon reported that Unalaska Island would be reached that same evening. A glance at the map will show its position in the Aleutian chain.

It has mountains towering to the moon, which the snow never leaves. And on a small island, in a lovely, enclosed bay, stands the town of Dutch Harbour.

¹ The *Scymnus Borealis* is probably the largest shark in the world, as it is undoubtedly the fiercest. I have seen specimens caught fifteen feet long, and they grow even to eighteen feet. — G. S.

They had mails for this town; and so the anchor was let go, and soon boats surrounded the ship and the decks were crowded with all kinds and conditions of men.

The stay here would be brief, the captain being anxious to get on to St. Michael's. But a party, among which were the doctor and his wife, with Wilson Webb, were landed, and much delighted were they with all they saw.

High, high above them were the dazzling peaks of the jagged and serrated mountains, but down below the valleys and the plains, many of the former wildly and picturesquely wooded, were green and beautiful. Birds sang in the bush and copses; and the whole earth seemed carpeted with flowers, which in the open hugged the ground, and in more shaded places were tall and plumed.

No one had taken a gun—it would have been cruel, anyhow, to have disturbed the reindeer, the strange little foxes, and the otters in their native wilds.

The streams appeared to abound with fish, and many kinds of game were seen in the scattered pine woods.

While admitting that this island must be a very paradise for the all-round sportsman, who could shoot and fish by turns, and study the wonders of nature when tired of rod and gun, Wilson had to content himself with taking snap-shots with his camera. But with this he was very successful

indeed, especially with pictures of river scenery, — waterfalls, rapids, and rocks.

The little party did not go on board until long after moonrise, and if the scenery was beautiful by day, under the moon's rays it was solemn and weird in the extreme.

As they rowed back to the ship, some one started a song, in which all joined and to which the very oars, in their rowlocks, seemed to keep time.

They were very happy.

But they were under way again next morning long before breakfast.

* * * * *

It was an Irishman, who, being asked to describe his native village, could only shake his head and smile and repeat over and over again, "Och thin, Ballintray is a quare place; a quare, *quare* place."

Well, and our heroes found St. Michael a "quare, quare place." And, indeed, I don't think that anybody looked upon it with any degree of favour. They had by this time settled down to their quiet, dreamy sea-life, and this was a rude awaking from so pleasant a dream.

A "quare" place, and a "quare" wee town on the island! The white population — if one is really justified in calling those dirty faces white — numbered probably about a hundred. Probably less; I am not quite certain, but then there were at least four Eskimos, or Innuits, to every civilised man.

It didn't appear possible to lynch a man here; for

although the rolling land was bonnie and flowery and green, there was not a tree to be seen. I should be sorry to say there was anything in the shape of a street, and the old-fashioned, wretched houses were stuck down anyhow and seemed to give one the cold shoulder by often turning their gables towards one.

But there was a warehouse — so called — here and there, and there were hills in the farther distance, on which it was pleasant for the eye to dwell; to say nothing of the fort.

St. Michael's is about sixty-five miles, as nearly as I can guess, north of the Yukon River, and in two days' time a river boat arrived to take them down there, and so up the broad and winding stream to the Land of Gold.

Wilson, the doctor, and young John went on shore here at St. Michael's, but as there was nothing very exhilarating about the place, and as the smell of decayed fish was not calculated to increase the appetite, they soon came on board again.

Everybody was hopeful, and the saloon of the steamer was never more bright and cheerful than it was that last evening, after dinner, when the lamps were lit and Wilson had taken out his fiddle and tuned it up.

The best of friends must part, and next morning the disembarkation and reëmbarkation took place; and before noon, farewells having been said to those they had to leave behind them, the *Innuits*, as

she was called, was under way and coasting down towards the great Yukon.

I have said nothing in my description of this voyage from San Francisco about the steerage passengers, or gold-seekers forward. Mostly young they were and hardy, as well they needed to be. Some were Americans, but there were Britishers there, too; and I may say here at once, and be done with it, that though a certain percentage of these failed in finding sufficient gold to reward them for their enterprise, most did well, and several came back rich and are now living in beautiful houses, and spending their money freely enough in their own countries.

It was pretty hot just at present on the Yukon, and the more scantily dressed one was, so much the better as regarded coolness. But the mosquitoes were in fine form, and Wilson Webb soon found out that they could bite beautifully, even through a thin Garibaldi shirt. They knew well what they were about, did those skeeters, and the very best places on which to alight and sample their man. The ear was a very favourite resort of the blood-thirsty creatures, and the next nicest place, I think, was the brow in man and the cheeks or necks of fair womanhood.

Yet, strange to say, some possessed a complete immunity from their tantalising attacks. Young John, for instance, and young John's father and mother were perfectly mosquito-proof.

Wilson certainly was not, nor the doctor and his dear little wife either, until he brought science to the

rescue, in the shape not only of a lotion to be applied night and morning to the exposed part of the skin, but of a draught to be taken at the same time.

To prove the efficacy of this, the doctor would catch a mosquito and, after pulling the wings off so that it could only crawl, place it on a sheet of white paper, then, dipping a clean pen in the lotion, draw a circle round it, when the unpleasant insect at once fell and expired.

But the triumph of his art was manifested when he operated on a white bull-terrier dog, which was so bitten and tormented that it was all but dead. The Doc. injected a few drops of the principal ingredient under the animal's skin and bathed him with the lotion. The dog was well in a few hours, and never again was much bitten.

It was considered in 'Frisco to be a very daring and foolhardy thing for the Doc. to take his young and somewhat fragile wife with him.

The doctor himself was not of that opinion. He knew what he was about, and he never had cause to repent it. Indeed, it was very much all the other way. For even before leaving the city of the Pacific slope, she proved her value in doing shopping; and many a little comfort did she purchase and pack up, that he himself would never have thought of.

Of course the amount of luggage or outfit was limited as to bulk and weight, but it is certain that Mrs. Debrett made the best of both, so that her husband was really proud of her.

And she had assisted Wilson Webb also in doing his shopping and choosing his outfit.

Moreover, when once fairly settled in Klondyke, she proved to be an excellent cook.

But stay, they are not quite there yet. There is all the long, wide river Yukon to navigate before they can reach the Land of Hope, the Country of Nuggets and Golden Sand.

CHAPTER XIX

STEAMING UP THE GREAT YUKON

"Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!
The river glideth at his own sweet will,
And all that mighty heart is lying still!"

— WORDSWORTH.

It was not to be supposed nor expected that the same comforts and accommodation were to be found on the river boat, *Innuity*, which had made life so pleasant on board the sturdy *Hopeful*. But as far as our heroes were concerned, this troubled them but little. They had come out here, not for pleasure, but profit, and were willing to gird up their loins and to rough it.

And everybody was healthy, happy, and cheerful. Wilson Webb was singing all day long. Singing for the same reason that the birds sing, because there is music in their hearts, born of their beautiful surroundings, and music *will* find vent.

Yes, everything they saw from the *Innuity's* deck now was new and strange, and some of the scenery was wild and beautiful in the extreme.

It was changeful, too, ever changeful, and so numerous were the islands that it was generally impossible to tell whether they were gazing on the river's

banks, or on some green little isle in the midst of the stream.

To describe in detail the scenery of a great and mighty winding river like this would, indeed, be a labour Herculean. Nor is it necessary. More wise, it is, to try to identify ourselves with those on board who gazed thereon, oftentimes, I fear, without appreciating it; hardly seeing it, perhaps, so filled with hopes and aspirations and plans for the future were their hearts.

For every one here was pregnant with ambition of one kind or another, though varied, perhaps, in degree.

Wilson Webb's was probably the highest, the most bounding. He could look ahead, too, with hope, and the happiness of anticipation, to a not far-distant time, when, with much fine gold in his coffers, he should be bounding homewards — yes, "bounding" is just the right word, in the right place — across the broad Atlantic, in a greyhound of the fastest, fleetest build, to the green shores of Merry England, and the arms of the girl he had left behind him.

The doctor's ambition was also high. He had all he loved on earth beside him, in the person of his nervous, anxious, but dear and pretty, wee body of a wife. But great possibilities were before him, and gold could do anything. He had not yet, and never would, regret the time he had spent in cowboy land. The wild life had made a man of him; had strengthened and hardened every muscle in his

body, even to that strongest of all muscles, the heart itself.

Yet a medical man's life in a city even like San Francisco, he told himself, was but toil and slavery; no time to call one's own, every joy or pleasure leavened with anxiety.

But with gold — ah! No wonder he rubbed his hands as the river went flowing past and the mountains and hills in the middle distance kept mingling and mingling, and seemingly shifting position every minute — yes, the gold! His country house should be a very beautiful one, his park all around it a garden of dreams, Lilla, as he called his little wife, its presiding genius. But their house and lovely grounds would not be all. No, there would be that yacht. She should not be a racer, but a voyager, broad in beam and comfortable, everything beautiful and luxurious, and its saloon like a mermaid's palace. Everything that high art and modern science could accomplish, would be done to make the yacht a triumph and the envy of all who might behold her.

"For what," reasoned the good doctor, "is the good of gold but to purchase pleasure?"

But Mrs. Debrett's ambition was not of so high a standard. Gold, she, too, would like to have, because its possession would render her husband happy, but a home life would have much greater charms for her than wandering far in foreign lands, or sailing in a lovely yacht over sunny seas, unknown.

Well, as to young John, he could scarce have told

any one what he should do with wealth and fortune, should he be lucky enough to fall in with any. He loved a gun, he loved a rod and a good dog, and that was about all in life he cared for.

Then as to his parents — old they were, though healthy and hardy — yet was their ambition tinged with a little sadness. Gold? Yes, they would find gold, but, heigho! they were wearing down, down towards the horizon of life, and gold is no good in the grave, and they should have no need of it in the land o' the leal.

Very steadily did the *Innuït* plough her way up the great Yukon. Eastward first, with now and then a bend towards the south; past many a strange and comfortless Indian village, where the wild inhabitants, some of them uncouth even to extreme ugliness, were so busy preparing salmon for the market that they hardly cast a glance towards the slowly passing steamboat; winding in and out, then pursuing an almost direct course northwards with just a trifle of east in it, till Nulato is reached, and soon after another river or tributary that rises far away among the Snow Mountains beyond the Arctic circle, passes the hills of Yukon, and slowly, broadening out, joins the main stream here.

Nulato was once, whatever it may be now, a great fur-company's post, and although the desolate and dreary place lies on flat rolling ground on the northern side of the river, it affords but few attractions for the traveller. Beautiful enough, however,

were now its summer surroundings, — the distant hills, the rocks and glens, and deep woods of darkest green, yet it is hardly the spot one would choose as a winter resort.

As in other places, fishing is here the principal employment of the natives, and this is carried on during the summer months by means of strange wicker eel-traps, and in winter through holes in the ice.

There is a tribe here, or near here, of savages far more ferocious in appearance than most met with elsewhere. In days gone by a terrible massacre of Russians took place at the foot of Nulato, the Indians fighting for the most part with bows and arrows and ugly-looking knives.

But now the river runs straight for many and many a mile, more northerly after a time, however, until Fort Yukon is reached. Then it is southward and east all the way until Dawson City, at the mouth of the Klondyke River, appears in sight. This river rises far to the northeast among the spurs of the Rocky Mountains, — a mere brown roaring burn at first, dashing on amidst a chaos of grey boulders, forming here a cataract, and here a dark brown pool, where trout and fish leap up in the glad sunshine; and so numerous are these at times that the surface of the water is as troubled, as if a shower of summer hail were falling on it.

Few, if any, men come to the Yukon for pleasure and sport alone; or if they do, they speedily catch the

gold fever, get hold of a claim, and proceed at once to make their fortunes, or try to.

But Wilson Webb, being at heart an artist as well as a photographer, could not be otherwise than struck by the strange and ever-varying character of the scenery. Even the hills and mountains, whether green and near, or serrated, snow-peaked, and far away, had a weirdness about them he had never seen surpassed. The river was sometimes very broad and shallow; at other times narrowed by frowning rocks and precipices, and so rapid, that it was, indeed a struggle for the *Innuits* to get on at all.

The forests or woods were often dense, and quite filled up the glens at times, and on more elevated and exposed ground the trees were growing only here and there. But strangely shaped they were and weird, for all had to do battle with the stormy winds of winter. The branches of the pines—mostly a kind of spruce—all pointed downwards. They would always grow thus, and it is doubtless a provision of nature, to save them from being broken by the weight of falling snow.

In these hills and near to the shelter of the woods the reindeer would often stand to gaze and wonder at the steamer; then, tossing their antlered heads in the air, dash off at a speed that the best of hounds could hardly have equalled.

It may be guessed that Wilson's camera was never idle. The only difficulty he experienced lay in choosing the views to seize upon. He would have liked

to have taken them all, and thus form a panorama, giving the whole sweep of the mighty Yukon.

* * * * *

Dawson City at long, long last!

Dawson City on the borders of the Land of Gold!

The real El Dorado would seem at present to be a wild circular tract of country, lying between the Rocky Mountains on the north and east, the Blue Mountains on the southeast, and the river itself from Fort Selkirk to Dawson City.

But the Klondyke River is itself the largest, and into it flows — high up-stream — many and many a tributary, chief of these being the Hunker, the Bean, and the Bonanza.

Into the Yukon, higher up still, flow the Indian and the Stewart rivers, and several others less important.

Neither Wilson Webb nor the doctor was much struck with the beauty of Dawson City. It seemed a lively enough place, built here and there and anyhow, one might say, by the river's bank, but many parts laid out in streets and squares, many houses farther inwards on the sparsely wooded, rugged, and rolling country. But on this lovely summer's day the broad river itself was shining like silver in the sunshine, and the brae-lands that bounded it to the

south resembled those surrounding some Scotch or Irish lochs.

Beauty or not beauty, every one was glad enough that the long voyage up-stream was ended at last, and that the work of gold-seeking would soon begin.

"Dawson City," said the aged miner, "is going to be a big place, by and by, whoever lives to see it. Ay," he added, "and the real incursion to Klondyke hasn't hardly begun yet. Indeed, young fellows, you may think yourselves happy to be here in time."

Wilson and the doctor went on shore to spend the evening and just see how things looked, but Mrs. Debrett stayed on board. City life of this kind was somewhat too rough for her.

The old man was going to hold back, and did for a time.

"Go into the town by all means, John," said his better half. "There'll be many who want to see you and welcome you back, and you can act as guide to the boys. Young John will stay on board with his old mother."

"That will I," said John, right heartily.

"Why, Webb," cried the Doc., just as they were starting, "wouldn't it be a good idea to take your fiddle?"

"Capital!" said Wilson, "and so I shall. Who knows but that I may have to fall back upon fiddling yet, when gold-digging fails me!"

Many had come down to see the unloading of the

Inuit; for she carried not only passengers, but quite a variety of stores.

The steerage people landed for good, and almost all were provided with tents, as well as their packages of tools, provisions, etc. They helped each other to carry these, and they formed quite a little camp all to themselves in the rear of the city.

Mr. Grimshaw, the old man miner, as it seems he was usually called in Dawson City, was hardly on shore before he was recognised, — not by one man, but by many.

In fact, before they reached the largest general store, he had to stop and shake hands at least a score of times, and quietly refuse about as many invitations to the saloon.

"These young fellows," he said, "want to see a little city life, and I'm their guide. D'ye lay to the situation?"

"We lay," they would reply; "but we'll see you at McRae's later on."

"Never fear."

"I'm just real glad," said Grimshaw, "that you paid for a year's provisions. 'Cause 'way up country the winter won't pass through without a kind of general famine.

"And things here," he added, "are just about starvation prices already. Let us go into this store and interview the merchant. Mind, it isn't his fault that provisions are high; some, you know, are more'n scarce, and then the trading companies have formed

a kind of corner. Greenhorns who haven't paid for a year's provisions before leaving Seattle or 'Frisco may make gold up the country, but when they come here, somehow the wind gets hold of it and it is soon scattered."

"Ah! Mr. Grimshaw," cried the storekeeper, "is it really your pleasant old-fashioned face I see before me? Shake. This is a pleasure. And the old woman, how is she?"

"Just as benign and beautiful as ever. I thank the Lord we both have health.

"Well, here are a couple of young fellows just out. They won't want much at present, mebbe, but later on. Only they'd like to have some idea of the prices of things."

This man behind the rough counter and surrounded by laden shelves of all sorts of provisions, and corners filled with pickaxes and shovels, boots, shoes, and what not, was an Englishman, and very civil indeed.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, "I've got a good supply of mostly everything; but I must tell you, to begin with, that you won't find food quite so cheap as you would in Oxford or Cambridge, but some articles are what we call reasonable.

"Here is rice, sugar, peas, and beans from thirty cents a pound, and bacon only two shillings. But moose hams I can't sell you under five shillings a pound, but rare good stuff it is, and potatoes to go with it, if the best, only two and six for a couple of pounds.

"Flour isn't extra cheap, though, and a hundred pounds will cost you well-nigh three sovereigns."

"Canned meats are cheap, I suppose?" said Webb.

"Well, say about two shillings a pound tin."

"And salmon must be very cheap?"

"I dunno. Maybe you'd better catch your own fish. Here is a kippered salmon, look you, and not a very big one, either, but he'll cost you seven shillings!"

Wilson Webb opened his eyes somewhat wider, and the Doc whistled.

"Well, now," said the former, "I'm fond of a good egg. We can get these, I suppose, for a penny each."

The storekeeper laughed.

"There are no such things as pennies here," he said, "and even a cent is never seen. It is only an imaginary coin. We deal mostly for gold dust. Those are our scales along the counter, yonder. Eggs, did you say?"

"Yes."

"We have two sorts. The ordinary ones I can do at six shillings, and the better class will cost you eight and six a dozen."

Wilson laughed heartily.

"I see," he said, "that the sooner we get up country to excavate the pay dirt, the better."

"That's so, gentlemen; and good luck go with you. Shake. Your voice, sir, brings back to me

many and many a pleasant scene on far-off English shores. Good-evening."

After walking about the town some time, they found their way to the principal saloon.

A lively shop, indeed, was this. And the old miner and his young friends were speedily surrounded. They must drink.

"Drinks, landlord, drinks!"

Wilson would have preferred something cooling to that fiery old rye, for the evening was close and hot, even outside. But here there was no iced water to be had.

The landlord shoved three or four bottles and half a dozen glasses towards them. They were supposed to help themselves, and take just as much or as little as they pleased. And whisky was cheap, if nothing else was.

"What! are you a fiddler?" said the landlord to Wilson, noticing him place his violin-case on the counter.

"I guess," was the reply, "I could play a little better, than the wretched gut-scraper you've got in your ball-room."

"Oh, for goodness' sake!" cried the saloon-keeper, "have another whisky and go in."

"With pleasure," said Wilson. "I'll play best without whisky, however."

A dance had just come to a conclusion, as the young fellow stepped behind the bar.

"I say," whispered the barman, "don't give 'em

too long a dance, 'cause, ye see, it's only between dances they drink."

Wilson's fiddling to-night was perfection, and the ball was kept up till long past twelve.

Then the old miner and his young friends went on board to sleep.

CHAPTER XX

"JACKIE HAS STRUCK THE PAY DIRT"

"Let us then be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate;
Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labour and to wait." — LONGFELLOW.

THERE was an artificiality about society in Dawson City that was very far, indeed, from being agreeable to either the doctor or Wilson Webb. Both had a real stake in life. To each of them

"Life was real, life was earnest."

Moreover, both loved nature, and might have said with Byron in his "Childe Harold": —

"I live not in myself, but I become
Portion of that around me; and to me
High mountains are a feeling, but the hum
Of human cities torture."

So they were not sorry when they managed to make a start, at last, eastward and away high up beyond Bonanza.

All went together; all those, I mean, who had become so friendly on board ship. Mr. Grimshaw, the old man miner, had managed, by means known only to himself, to retain not only his claim but his house, during his absence down south, — "inside"

the states, — so that all that was to be done now was to reopen.

The roads to the upper regions of the Klondyke were really no roads at all, only beast tracks. Sometimes they led over high and rugged hills, sometimes through dark and dismal woods and forests, or across great, treeless plains, and anon along the bottom of some rocky ravine.

But the men-folks helped on the ladies; and after all, I am not sure that, old though Mrs. Grimshaw was, she did not show more courage and cheerfulness than any one.

Carriage and portorage was an expensive item, but the men had come prepared, and they somehow sincerely believed that fortune lay before them. What mattered a few extra dollars when going to a land where wealth was scattered broadcast, and gold was to be had everywhere for the digging!

And now it was arranged that the old lady, with the doctor's wife, should occupy the log-hut, while the men-folks dwelt in tents, until they could prepare themselves houses.

But the anxiety to get on, and to commence work, was paramount and above everything. It was well, indeed, for the doctor and Wilson, that they had made the acquaintanceship of such a trustworthy fellow as old John. There were many little outs and ins, many odds and ends, that only lengthy experience could have taught them, had not John put them up to the ropes.

And the prevailing trait in young John's character was good nature.

He soon got his father's claim under way and once more into working order, and, greatly to everybody's astonishment and delight, it panned out far better than it had done before.

The Doc. and Wilson Webb had no difficulty in securing claims for themselves, and set to work like men.

Wilson's was at some considerable distance from the other, and not far from a little mountain stream that did not go dry even in summer.

But now the curious thing was this, — that is, if in such a place as Klondyke anything can be called curious, — Wilson seemed to become at once the favourite of fortune, while for months and months the poor Doc. had literally no luck at all.

No wonder he began to get nervous and fidgety, — the worst state of mind it is possible to be in.

"Keep steadily on," said the old man miner, "and some fine morning you'll find that luck will come, all in a jump."

"I don't believe," said the poor Doc., "there lies a pound of pay dirt in the whole of my claim."

"Nonsense!" cried the old man.

"And think what it means to me, with winter but a measurable distance ahead, and I incurring expenses every day; money going out, and no gold coming in. Why, Mr. Grimshaw, the situation spells ruin!"

"My dear young fellow!" cried Grimshaw, earnestly enough now; "pray do not let down your heart. Here am I, old enough to be your father, working cheerily from morn till night, taking fortune as it comes."

"You are one of the favoured."

"There are none such. In Klondyke, as in every other land where gold is found, there are ups and downs. Those that lose heart soon sink and fail; but never in all the history of gold-mining, did a persevering man go unrewarded in the long run."

"Well," replied Dr. Debrett, forcing a smile; "I thank you for your kindly encouragement."

"'Tis not in mortals to command success;
But I'll do more — deserve it."

"Bravo!" said his old friend; "that is spoken like a man. Now, just settle down quietly, and — look here! vary your work a bit. Begin, to build your house."

And so the doctor did. There was little, if any, night just at present, and Wilson Webb had already commenced his. Luckily, he had plenty of tools, and was a very fair specimen of a carpenter.

But, to the surprise of everybody, Wilson's house was to be a three-storied one. When asked to explain, he just smiled, and said nothing.

Dr. Debrett was content with a log-hut of one room, but it was so neatly arranged inside, that it had quite a home look about it. Nor were orna-

ments wanting nor — *mirabile dictu!* — a cushion to the easy-chair, a footstool, and a pipe-rack; so that after coming in from the toils of the day, the Doc. could really enjoy himself and imagine he was at home. But *was* he not? Yes, Lilla was the presiding goddess, and the doctor himself would have told you that it was home wherever she was. I do not really know what he would have done without her.

She not only loved him, worked for him, darned and sewed for him, — these may not be very romantic occupations, but they are exceedingly useful in Klondyke, — but she consoled him in her own womanly way, and with her own womanly logic.

He threw himself into his chair one evening, with a tired sigh.

And Lilla lit his pipe.

He took it without a word. Thanks and gratitude were understood.

"A little weary, dear?"

"Weary, Lilla? Why, my little wife, weary is no word for it. If it wasn't for you, I'd go straight away home again, and make for the city of 'We're-all-here.' Hang Klondyke! Here am I, slaving from morning till night, my hands are already as hard as a navvy's, my back aches so constantly that I feel certain I'm getting a stoop, but though other fellows have luck, none comes my way. Is a man old when he feels old, Lilla? Then I'm ninety-five years nine months and a week. Why, Grimshaw is a mere boy to me!"

"Luck will come, dear. We must be patient."

"But Luck *doesn't*. The jade doesn't see me. Or she thinks perhaps I ought to be putting legs in splints, extracting bullets, or lancing children's gums, in cowboy town. Bah! I said to Grimshaw that I'd do more than command success — I'd deserve it. Lilla, that was only just a bit of poetic bluff. I may deserve it a thousand times over. Much good that does, if Luck goes down the other side of the hill."

"Do you know what I've cooked you for supper, Charlie?"

"Oh, Lilla, Lilla! How like a woman! When a man is worrying over such weighty matters as gold dust and nuggets, she wants to divert my thoughts to — but what is for supper, dear wee wifie mine?"

"Two lovely mountain grouse, and bacon!"

"Hurrah! well, I'll sit in."

And he did.

And really, judging from the speed with which he reduced one of those beautiful birds to a skeleton, bad luck had not much affected his appetite, anyhow.

Coffee — really good, fragrant coffee, but nothing stronger.

"Better than all the old rye in the world," he said, as he reseated himself in the easy-chair, with pipe in hand, and his third big cup within easy reach of his hand.

Lilla sat on a low "creepie" by his side after mak-

ing up the fire, so that she could mend that stocking, and lean against his knee at the same time.

"Charlie dear," she said after a pause, "there is only one thing needed to complete our happiness."

"Gold?"

"No, the cat!"

"So like a woman, again!"

"Yes, but I feel really sorry we didn't bring poor Tim with us. I think I can see him sitting on the footstool yonder, nodding to the fire and singing.

"It is so soothing and consolatory, you know," she added.

"Oh, *very*," he said. He spoke sarcastically. "I suppose if you had the cat, you wouldn't mind staying here all your life."

"The cat and you, Charlie! The cat and you!"

She looked up in his face very innocently, and he couldn't help bending down to kiss her brow.

"You're only a baby!" he said.

"I'm afraid that is all," said Lilla. "But, heigho! everybody can't be a man. *Can* everybody?"

A few nights after this, Wilson was putting what he called the finishing touches to his "mansion," as the miners had named it, when the doctor strolled in.

Webb was working by candlelight. He had made these dips himself from the fat of a bear, that one of the boys had killed in a wood hard by.

The young fellow seemed very happy and cheerful, and was singing low to himself as he worked.

"Ha! Doc.," he cried, "seat yourself, old man. You'll find 'baccy there. How lucky we took a good supply of the blessed stuff! Well, and how do you pan?"

"Pan?" replied the doctor, in a sadly aggrieved tone of voice. "Man alive! that claim of mine isn't worth shucks. A man might slave away there for a dozen years and not find enough gold to keep him in shaving soap. I'm going prospecting to-morrow, and if I don't find a good thing, why, I'll believe that fate has made a dead set against me."

"Keep up your courage, Doc. There are good times coming!"

"Good times, indeed! Pah! that is what you all say, you and old Grimshaw and young John, and the whole of you. I'd like to see them, that's all."

Well, Dr. Debrett and one or two other disappointed miners did go prospecting next day, and old Mrs. Grimshaw went to stay with Lilla, and keep her company.

All round about the neighbourhood, where our hero had settled, there were many claims, and many good fellows hard at work, some drawing blanks, while to others, Fortune, the fickle jade, was dealing out "trumps."

Well, we cannot all be born with silver spoons in our mouths. Some of us have to be contented with Britannia metal.

But what I was going to say was this: to each and all of these sturdy miners Lilla was a queen.

Whether rich or poor, they would have done anything for her, and ever when she passed by they stood erect and doffed their grubby hats, and were rewarded with the sweetest of smiles.

"I had a dream last night," said Lilla, on the second morning after her husband's departure.

"A dream, dearie?"

"Yes, Mammy Grimshaw; I thought Charlie and I were sailing over a blue, blue sea, in a lovely yacht. Oh, so lovely! for the decks were mother-of-pearl and the sails of beaten gold."

Mammy Grimshaw laughed.

"I hope the dream will come true," she said.

"Oh, I'm going to make it come true, mammy!" cried Lilla, merrily. Then she struck a theatrical attitude, with one hand raised on high.

"This is Charlie's style," she said:

"'Tis not in mortals to command success;
But we'll do more — deserve it.'

"But Charlie lets down his heart too soon, and that isn't deserving it, is it?"

Then this queer little woman took out of a box a spare mining-suit of Charlie's. Of course they were much too big for her, but she put them on all the same, and made Mammy Grimshaw dispose of the extra longitude in arms and legs with the aid of a darning-needle and a stout thread.

The hat well-nigh buried her; so she threw that to one side and put on a hood of her own.

Next she got hold of a pick and a shovel, and prepared to march.

"'Tis not in mortals to command success," she said. "But how do I look on the whole, Mrs. Grimshaw?"

"Very nice, dear."

"But I'll do more, mammy — I'll deserve it."

The miners did stare as Lilla passed them on this particular morning, and more than one sturdy fellow went forward to meet her and offered to carry her tools.

But she thanked him and refused the proffered aid, and hurried on to her husband's claim.

Now there was one of the boys to whom not only the doctor but Mrs. Debrett had been exceedingly kind. He was a bad boy, that is true, — a kind of a Klondyke ne'er-do-weel, — though I daresay that, like most of us, he had some good in him, deep down. A blue-eyed, bright-faced young fellow of about seventeen, who did odd jobs for everybody, but never failed to get the worse for drink when he had a chance.

He happened to be very much down on his luck on this particular morning, white-faced and hungry-looking.

He simply doffed his hat and stood before Mrs. Debrett, near to the claim.

"Well, Jackie, haven't you a word to say?"

"Can't think of nuffin, miss."

Jackie was really a London lad. He had been by turns a shoeblack, a paper boy, a boot-lace boy, a

stowaway, and so forth; but here he was, and nobody would see Jackie starve.

"Well, run off at once to Mammy Grimshaw's—she's in the doctor's hut—and get something to eat, and be back here in a brace of shakes. Ahem!"

Jackie ran like a hare.

"Brace of shakes!" said Lilla to herself. "Why, I'm getting quite nautical. So this is hubbie's claim! Dear hubbie! Why, he's a good way down, and what heaps of stuff all about. Well, I'm going to work."

And in she went.

Her hands were red and sore before she had laboured for half an hour. She had to straighten up every now and then to get the kinks out of her back. But she started again every time afresh.

"Poor Charlie!" she said, "no wonder he looks weary and old when he comes home."

But now came Jackie, running. He was a cute lad, and there was nothing he didn't know about mining; only in Klondyke it is simple enough, or was in those days, there being no quartz-crushing.

Well, those two strange miners slaved away all day, but without much luck.

Jackie had a good supper, though, and a dollar. He promised faithfully not to touch rye, and he kept his word. So when he turned up the next day at the hut, he was much more bright and cheerful.

"I'm goin' to be a downright water-bibber," he said. "Goin' to save all my bloomin' skivvies, and by and by, buy a claim, and become a bloomin' millionaire."



HER HANDS WERE RED AND SORE BEFORE SHE HAD LABOURED FOR
HALF AN HOUR.

"Well, I hope you may, Jackie; but you mustn't say 'bloomin',' because it's a bad word, except when applied to flowers."

Wonders never cease at Klondyke, and when, that same day, Jackie was seer. executing a wild dance all around the cradle and sluice box, now on top of a heap of earth or gravel, now in a hollow, and whooping like an Indian, then says one miner to another, "Jackie's drunk again, Tim."

"That ain't a drunk," said Tim. "Jackie's struck the pay dirt, or I'm a Dutchman."

"Let's go and see."

They went, and Tim was right.

Jackie showed them a nugget, then Lilla herself produced another, and if either was worth a brass farthing, it was worth two hundred dollars, and more.

Poor Lilla! she scarcely could sleep that night for joy.

When she opened the door next morning, behold! there was faithful Jackie, curled up for all the world like a tame coyote, in a big tub lined with straw.

So sound asleep was he that she had to shake him for nearly a minute before she succeeded in waking him.

Jackie had been on watch all night, with a revolver hidden among the straw, but had sunk to sleep at last.

"Poor lad!" she said, and went away to make his breakfast, and her own.

CHAPTER XXI

"A NEW SORT OF SAUCE?—GOLD!"

"Gold! Gold! Gold! Gold!
Bright and yellow, hard and cold;
Spurned by the young, but hugged by the old
To the very verge of the churchyard mould."

—HOOD.

It was quite a fortnight after the discovery of those splendid nuggets before Dr. Debrett returned. Lilla was getting very uneasy about him indeed, when, one evening, soon after sundown, travel-stained and weary, he dragged himself up to the door of his hut.

I daren't attempt to describe the joy of that meeting. But Mrs. Grimshaw went quietly home. She was not needed any more for the present.

Then more dry wood was heaped on the fire, and Lilla, with her sleeves rolled up, and looking quite "wifey," as the Doc. expressed it, proceeded to cook.

Jackie had taken an hour off, and had brought some beautiful mountain trout home.

"And you don't ask me, Lilla dear, if I've had any luck this journey."

"Oh, no, Charlie. I can read disappointment in your face; but never mind, dear. No, never mind!"

"Of course not," answered Charlie, with some

degree of bitterness and irony. "Of course I won't mind. I rather like the situation. Starvation is one of the best things in the world, and ragged clothes is next nicest. And winter coming on too! Capital!

"But, I say, Lilla, where on earth have you been with your hands? They're as hard and brown as old John's. Been grubbing among the pay dirt? Eh?"

Lilla didn't answer.

She just laughed a little, dished the trout, and then going to a box in the corner, took therefrom two heavy pickle-bottles, and placed one at each side of her husband's plate.

"What in all the world have you got there, dear? Some new sort of sauce? Eh?"

Then he took up a bottle.

"What a weight! Why! I say, Lilla! Wh-wh-why, lass, this is GOLD!"

Then Lilla sat down on her husband's knee, for just half a minute, to receive her reward in — thanks.

The sleeve of her best gown was resting lovingly on top of the fried fish, but that didn't seem to signify one little bit, back nor fore.

"Well, well, well!" cried the Doc., when he had eaten nearly all the trout, and lit his pipe. "Why, wonders will never cease! Lilla, you're a jewel!"

And high up in those curling wreaths of smoke, the good doctor could see once more visions of the beautiful home he had promised himself, and the beautiful yacht on sea.

* * * * *

The doctor's claim kept well to the fore; so did that of Wilson Webb; but the Grimshaw diggings somehow came to a sudden close. They had struck a rocky kind of quartz, and the old man miner determined to give up for a bit.

But young John had too much energy in him to be easily downcast.

He got a fresh claim, and commenced digging on his own account. But winter had come now in downright earnest, and so work was doubly hard and tiring.

The stimulus to gain gold, however, more and more gold, kept both the doctor—with Jackie to help—and Wilson Webb, working whenever it was possible. Washing was out of the question, but they secured the dirt just the same. The miners here were honest. Had any one been caught pilfering from a neighbour's claim, rough, indeed, would have been the handling he would have received from his brother-miners.

If thieves had stolen anything, I do not think it would have been gold, but food; for some of these poor fellows were hard enough pushed now, and as the weather got worse, these, having no provisions, made up their wealth in packages, and started off down west to Dawson City.

As I am telling a plain, unvarnished tale, I need not trouble to conceal the truth. Well, then, to return to Dawson was about the worst move these miners could have made. For here they had to

live in common lodging-houses, at tremendous expense, and pay for everything they ate or drank with their hard-earned gold.

An idle life is an irksome one; and many of them sought for mental relief by smoking all day long, and by appearing every night at the alluring dance, the drinking-bar, and the gambling-table.

Then, when spring began to return with floods that washed away the snow, quite a large percentage of these unhappy men succumbed to illness.

These would never dig again; nevermore handle pan or pick or shovel.

.It was even suspected that more than one of them, overwhelmed with despair, hastened their own ends; though this is almost too terrible to believe.

When spring came back in reality, and all in a jump, as some miners described it, Wilson Webb announced his intention of leaving Klondyke. The rumour spread abroad, and more than one speculator offered to buy his claims and pay him handsomely in nuggets.

"No," he said, "no; I am going home with a purpose, but I shall retain my claims"—he had taken up *three*, though he worked but one—"I shall retain my claims, and my house as well, because I'm coming back, and that, too, I hope, long before the summer has ended."

Perhaps Wilson was speaking without his host. That host was a compound one, and composed, if so

I may word it, of the steamboat, the ice, the wind, and the weather generally.

However, he packed up. Young John promised, and so did the doctor, to give a look at Wilson's diggings and claim once a week, at least.

And so with hurried farewells, with a heart full of hope, and gold in his boxes, galore, our hero Webb departed.

There was ice on the river, but it was in floating streams, and the steamer was a strong one, and so could give those baby icebergs points in speed of floating, and beat them hand over hand.

We, the readers and author, have the wings of imagination and so can fly faster even than the albatross, and thus we get back to England long before Wilson Webb has reached the mouth of the Yukon.

* * * * *

Now those two boys, Laurie and Ernest, felt just as sure of going out to Klondyke, to make their fortunes, after they received that long letter from their dear friend Wilson, as they felt certain of the sun rising the day after to-morrow.

The letter to Ernest and Laurie—for it coupled both their names—was quite a business one, but most friendly and generous. Here is a bit of it, read by Laurie himself one beautiful spring morning, by the banks of the stream, and with interested and sparkling-eyed Leebie looking over his shoulder.

'Well, you lads must be seventeen now, and

begun again, and my wee favourite, Leebie, is mebbe wee no longer. Fifteen is not old, I confess. How I wish I were fifteen once again! But a girl of fifteen isn't a baby, so Leebie must not shed more than about ten tears when I take you boys back with me to Klondyke. It will be just too awfully jolly for anything. And somebody else is going back with me, too—you would never guess—"

"*I'm* going for *one*," cried Leebie, interrupting. "Perhaps you would guess *that*, boys?"

"You've heard me speak of Madeleine Peters," the letter ran on. "Well, we are both going to be married, yes, the whole lot of the two of us are to be married,—for I shall marry Maddie, and Maddie is going to marry poor me."

"Anybody could have guessed that," said Leebie, nodding her pretty head. "And I shall go out as Maddie's maid. Oh, I'm determined to!"

"Well, boys," the letter continued, "I'll be with you mebbe a week after you get this, unless unforeseen circumstances determine my stay in the city of C——."

"Ha! ha!" Leebie laughed, roguishly. "I know what that means. *I* know. *I* know."

"Don't I, Towsie? Don't I, Currie?"

From the capers those two dogs now cut, it really looked as though they had been listening to the reading of that long letter, and fully understood every word of it.

And even Neddy must lift up his voice and laugh,

with a "*Haw-hee*" and likewise a "*Hee-haw*," till the echoes rang from wood and brae.

Well, Farmer Lea was a very easy-going farmer, indeed, and Mrs. Lea was a true English farmer's wife. Contented and happy always—till now, and even *now* they could see no objections to Laurie going out to Klondyke. He would be in good hands, and the boy must do something, for the farm hardly paid.

But, ah! to think of Leebie wanting to go with him!

Dreadful!

Leebie would never return. No, they could not spare *her*.

This was the situation when Wilson Webb and his young bride turned up one day at the farm.

Now, Farmer Lea had known Wilson before and had a high regard for him, but Madeleine he had never yet seen. Her sweet young face, and that bonnie bride's bonnet, took the honest farmer's heart quite by storm, however.

The young folks could only stay for a day, they said, but Lea had told them that day must extend to a week, and they consented.

Leebie Lea was not slow to see that this would be for her advantage.

She enlisted Maddie's services in pleading her cause.

"If *you* can stand Klondyke," she said, "so, I'm sure, can *I*. So do get father to let me go."

"I'll do my best, dear," said Maddie; "you may rely on that."

"And you are really going to Klondyke," said Lea after dinner that evening. "*You*, so young, so tender! Oh, Mrs. Webb, you will never, never return! Ice and snow all the year round. Surely, you will not venture!"

But Wilson Webb laughed heartily.

"Why," he said, "the tenderest child can stand the climate of Klondyke. In fact, children *are* there, and ladies too. The summer, the spring, and even the autumn are charming; blue skies and fleecy clouds, birds singing in every woodland and grove, and wild flowers everywhere. During these seasons it is, indeed, a land to be loved, and the winters, though somewhat dark and dreary, are really no worse than they are in the far north of Scotland."

"Is that really so? But then, are not the hardships to be endured very great while getting there?"

"No; not by any manner of means, when one goes about it in the right way. Then think of the fortunes to be made! Here, in this country,—which really is played out,—all is a struggle and a grind, simply to make ends meet, and even this is often impossible.

"So long as a man is young, Mr. Lea, he can fight for life against adverse fortune, here in England; but when old age begins to load him down, tinge his hair with grey, and bow his shoulders, the struggle is all unequal. It was but the other day, sir, I heard a

man, holding a good position in commercial life, make this remark: 'I care not how soon I die.'

"What!" I said, 'are you tired of life already?'

"No, no," he replied; 'the love of life but increases with years. But I have all I can do even now to live, and old age would be for me but one long, lingering death.'

"Well," said Lea, "I'm fifty; I daresay I am a little too old for Klondyke!"

Then Wilson Webb told him all about the old man miner and his wife.

Mr. Lea looked at *his* wife.

"Shall *we* go, dear?" he said.

"Nay, nay, husband," she answered. "I wouldn't exchange my dear old English farm for life in a heathen land, where ne'er is heard the chime of Sunday bells, for all the gold in Ophir."

"No more would I," said Lea. "Light my pipe."

But so prettily did Mrs. Webb play her cards that at last Farmer Lea consented to let Leebie go with her, on the promise that if, on her arrival in Klondyke, she did not like the place, or was homesick, Wilson himself should come all the way, straight back with her.

* * * * *

But there was the question of expenses to be considered as far as Laurie and Ernest were concerned. This was soon got over.

"I owe my life and my liberty to these boys," said Wilson, speaking most earnestly now, "and as some

return for so great a favour, they must permit me to pay their passage and journey to Klondyke. And if pride prevents them from accepting this as a free gift, then I will respect their feelings. They can pay me back from the gold they dig from their claims the first year."

Then Ernest brought Wilson to see his father.

There was not the slightest difficulty about obtaining *his* consent.

"By all means," said the jolly old English squire, "let the lad go out. If he doesn't make a fortune, why, he can only fail. I'm not sure that, morally speaking, failure won't be as good for him as fortune. What do you think yourself, my son?"

"Think!" replied Ernest, with sparkling eyes, as, boylike, he encircled his father's neck. "I couldn't tell you all I think. Only just one thing,— you're the best and dearest of daddies, and if I had my way, an Act of Parliament should be brought in to have all fathers built on the same model, and that would be yours."

"Well," said the squire, laughing, "mind you take care of my lad, Mr. Webb, and, by the way, you may just as well come and dine with us to-night, and bring Mrs. Webb and Mr. Lea's children; they and I are old friends.

"Who knows," he added, "that I shan't take a run out to Klondyke myself, after hearing you dilate a little further on its golden glories."

"No, no, daddy, we won't have you. Providence,

you know, didn't make Klondyke for English squires: only for younger sons."

"Good-morning, Mr. Webb. Six o'clock. We are all early people here."

"Six o'clock, with pleasure, sir."

CHAPTER XXII

A SPORTSMAN'S PARADISE

"Fur and feather, heath and heather,
Birds and beasts in bush and tree,
With rod and gun, with sport and fun,
Alaska is the land for me." — *Alaska*.

Six o'clock precisely!

Well, it was, perhaps, an early hour for society people to dine. But the squire was old enough to be entirely independent of society and its customs. And he was there himself to meet his guests, his brave, broad bosom heaving under an expanse of what the miners would call "starched shirt"; his jolly red face beaming with smiles, that half hid his kindly eyes.

Well, Mrs. Elliot was there also; a dear little woman, people said who knew her best, only nobody would have gone so far as to say she was the squire's better half. And when she graced any public entertainment with her presence, she was referred to by the local reporters simply as the squire's lady. She belonged to the non-assertive class, which very many ladies do not.

"Why, what have you got there, Mr. Webb?" said the squire.

"Oh," said Ernest, "I made him bring that."

And he took Wilson's violin-case and placed it on the hall-table, as he spoke.

"That," said Wilson, "is my first wife, and though you would hardly call me a bigamist, I am happy to say she is still alive."

The dinner was a very great success, not exactly from a culinary point of view, for the squire did not retain the services of a French cook, but because every one was so happy and cheerful, and it really did the squire's heart good to look at the joyous, beaming young faces of the children, as he persisted in calling Ernest, Laurie, and Leebie.

But for a whole hour, if not more, after dinner, the squire kept Wilson Webb all to himself, and kept him talking too, mostly about the wonderful river, the river Yukon.

Wilson having gone down the mighty stream—which, by the way, is in some places over five miles from bank to bank—as well as up it, and having amassed a whole portfolio of views thereof, which he had brought with him to-night, was no mean authority on the subject.

And Wilson was tremendously enthusiastic, and a portion of this enthusiasm communicated itself to the squire.

"Heigho!" he said, "I'd like nothing better, I do believe, than to be a young man, with nothing much belonging to me except a pick and a spade and a gun."

"Why, making one's fortune," he added, "all by one's own exertions, must be more exciting by far than even football — Rugby rules!"

"It is, sir," said Wilson, "and I've tried both. But at the lowest estimate, the output of gold from these regions will soon be greater than that, from all the other regions of the earth combined. It is scarcely to be computed in figures, and lucky, indeed, will they be who are there in time."

Then he described to his earnest listener all the strange but beautiful, though often dreary scenery, of the Yukon; especially in its upper regions, with its mountains, its hills, and its multitude of islands, too numerous far to be even counted.

Wilson Webb was nothing if not a naturalist; even the wild flowers found on the river banks and in the glens appealed to his very heart. They were, every one, a poem.

"Just after you start to steam up the river, the scenery may be somewhat uninteresting, though half covered in haze, as it often is, it has a look of mystery about it that makes one long to land and explore.

"But even here on the banks grow the silver saugh, stunted alder, and several species of willows, where birds abound in springtime. With the rattle of the engine you may not be able to hear them, but with your glasses they may be seen. About opposite to the head of Norton Bay, and just where the river begins to flow from the east, we encounter lovely woods."

"Ah! it is there I should like to be," said the squire, lighting a fresh cigar.

"Well, sir, as you would expect, the trees are mostly—with the exception of the cottonwood—just those you meet with in Scotland, and the silver birches on the braes are exceedingly beautiful. And as in Scotland, berries grow everywhere wild in the woods,—blaeberries, raspberries, splendid cranberries, crowberries, and even currants."

"A good country for sport, I suppose?"

"Yes, I was coming to that. Though, mind you, sir, with the prospect of getting gold for the gathering higher up, he would be a very enthusiastic sportsman, indeed, who would think twice about either fur or feather.

"Well, whether bears are or are not to be ranked as fur, there they are—plenty of them,—brown, black, and grizzly, and very far north, the gigantic white bear himself.

"Then there are all sorts and—I was almost saying—sizes of foxes,—the red fox and the black fox, and higher up the real Arctic or white fox, but these latter, I am of opinion, are only white in winter.

"There are otters, also, in abundance on every wild stream; and they tell me there are beavers, as well, to be found, but I have never seen them. I mentioned the black fox, sir, but that is really the pekan or fisher marten.

"Then the wolverene, I am sure, would interest any

one. It looks like a little bear, though its face is that of a dog with a high domed skull. It would be easier to say what it doesn't eat than what it does. It is a very great enemy to the birds, its claws enabling it to climb the highest trees. It will even attack cattle and reindeer."

"Well, are the reindeer common on the Yukon?"

"Not very plentiful.

"But there are plenty of wolves, and they come down in winter, their tracks often being found near the huts. And, of course, there are marmots and rabbits too, in abundance.

"The grizzly is found among the mountains, and my own experience is that, unless you are spoiling for a fight, it is best to give him a wide berth.

"The brown bear of these regions is quite a character, in whatever way you consider him. He has a hobby of his own, and that is fishing. Moreover, he is an epicure in his way, and will only eat salmon, and that, too, the best and cleanest. He is very fierce, moreover, and many terrible fights take place every year between the Indians and these monsters.

"Nevertheless, the brown bear has his uses, for if a traveller follows his trail, he will not go far wrong; he will find all the easiest travelling and the best fords, — always, however, having to keep his weather eye open, in case of meeting Mr. Bruin himself. And Mr. Bruin always stops to question one.

"Well, away on the more mountainous districts,

big game is found, — deer, moose, sheep, goats, and caribou.”

“Well, Mr. Webb, you speak for all the world like a book, and the wonder to me is, that you don't write one!”

“Oh,” said Wilson, laughing. “I'm going to.”

“But, you haven't said a word about feathers yet.”

“No, sir; nor fish.

“Well, then,” he continued, “the higher regions of the Yukon, and all around, are, during the short, but delightful, summer season the home of more birds than can easily be imagined. But they are nearly all emigrants, either from the states of America, or from the far north. For here we find the snow-bunting, or snow-flea, as Greenland sailors call it, and that loveliest gull in all creation, the snow-bird whose plumage rivals the driven snow in its purity and whiteness. Warblers are in very great abundance, and wrens of various sorts.

“But, sir, one should scarcely expect to find the humming-bird here, but here it is, nevertheless, flitting from wild flower to wild flower, and sipping its sweets. We have bobolinks, also, and grosbeaks, and, later on, grouse, wild duck, teal, etc., and as many as one cares to shoot

“Trout swarm in the lakes, and in every brown pool of every mountain stream; and I fear I should be accused of telling a mere sailor's yarn, if I mentioned how many the Indians sometimes haul out in a single

hour, with the most ordinary and simple of fishing-gear.

"And as to salmon, why, the Yukon has probably more than any other river of its size in the known world.

"We miner people, however, have little time or inclination to fish. All our thoughts are on gold, gold, gold!"

"Well, Mr. Webb, I don't altogether blame you; for hunting for treasure must become a kind of mania, even as gambling does, after a time. But nevertheless, you have been describing a sportsman's paradise. How I should like to be there with rod and gun!

"But come," he continued, "my good fellow; we want to see your first wife."

"You shall, sir, and hear her too. Probably Mrs. Elliot will preside at the piano."

Mrs. Elliot did, and so the evening passed quietly and pleasantly away. It was one to be remembered long, long after this, when those who sat in the squire's cheerful drawing-room that evening were far, far away in the wilds of Klondyke.

CHAPTER XXIII

OVER THE SEAS, AND OVER THE LAZ

"Ye gentlemen of England,
Who live at home, at ease,
Ah! little do you think upon
The dangers of the seas." — *Old Song*.

"Come wander with me, for the moonbeams are bright
On river, in forest, o'er mountain and lea." — JEFFREYS.

WHY, the emigration of our young friends was quite an exodus.

It is really a difficult thing for an author to deal with so many heroes and heroines. He is thus handicapped and just a little bewildered, as the circus rider must feel, who goes hooping round the sawdust stage, riding on one beauty, and driving half a score before him.

Well, to say nothing of the two boys, — young fellows, then, — Wilson Webb, with his happy little wife, and Leebie, who seemed happier than anybody, here on board this ocean greyhound is the English, wall-eyed, but wise, old bob-tailed sheep-dog Towsie and daft, droll little Currie. Nominally, these dogs, while on board, were in charge of the cook. Really and truly, they were in Leebie's charge, and nobody else's.

"I don't know," said the chief mate, "that I can permit your dogs, miss, to come running aft. Dogs are generally kept shut up, most of the time."

"Oh, captain!" pleaded Leebie, most prettily, "Towsie and Sir Duncan Currie have been used to run wild on the prairie, — I mean the moor, — and if shut up, they would die. Then, captain, so would I."

I think the chief officer rather liked being styled captain, and then Leebie was such a beautiful girl. He spoke lower now, and bent down towards her as he said: —

"Do pretty much as you please about it," he said, "but don't get me into hot water, if possible. I will pretend not to see them, and I'll tell the other officers to do the same."

"Oh, thank you, thank you; it is so kind!"

So the two dogs had far more liberty than is generally granted to animals of the race canine when crossing the broad Atlantic.

At first, Towsie and Currie were observed to be holding little consultations together, concerning the peculiarity of the circumstances under which they were placed.

"I say, Currie, old man," said Towsie, on the very first morning they were let out for a dance, "I say, it does seem funny, don't it?"

"Seems to me, Towsie," replied Currie, "we're going somewhere, and if it wasn't that master and mistress were both here, I wouldn't half like it."

"Well, I'm sure I don't, and I'd feel far more at

home among the heather. The house keeps moving so, too, and outside all the world is water. Besides, my head is swimming so, Currie, and I can't stand nor walk across the floor without almost falling. But here comes the servant with breakfast."

They were fed and felt better.

"I say," said Currie, "there are some things in this world that even dogs can't understand, vastly superior in intellect though they be to men beasts as a general rule."

"True, Currie, true."

"Well, Towsie, my philosophy is this: 'what ye can't understand, don't worry over.' Care killed a cat, Towsie, so what do you say to a scamper? There isn't any grass or flowers growing here, but never mind. I'm off."

He was off indeed, and so was Towsie, round and round and round the decks in a wild, daft, indescribable kind of a scamper, and though they often fell, they soon got up again. It is true that Towsie collided with a boy carrying a huge dish, brought the lad to the deck, smashing the dish and scattering about a score of crisp brown sausages in the lee scuppers. A trifle like that did not signify a bark to either Currie or Towsie. They ran till tired, then trotted aft to the quarter-deck, where it was a deal drier and more pleasant, and commenced to make acquaintances among the saloon passengers. In this they were most successful, especially with the children; so it is no wonder that before the vessel was

three days out, the "twa dogs" were the greatest favourites on board.

Leebie had only one grief. She had not been able to take Bobbie and Neddy with her. But she hoped to meet them again when all her wanderings were over; and she was determined to present both these pets with patent-leather harness mounted with Klondyke gold.

* * * * *

Well, there was a long and even dangerous journey before our people yet, before they should reach the Land of Gold.

Wilson Webb was, of course, captain-commandant of this brave expedition, and after his arrival at New York he had to consider and choose one of two routes, and there was no one with whom he might consult.

If you have a map of the world, reader,—and a very handy aid to one's memory such a broad sheet is,—you will easily find Lake Winnipeg, that majestic inland sea that lies a long way south and west of Hudson's Bay.

Had Wilson taken his party there, he could have gone by railway to Vancouver, and thence across the water to Victoria, and thence again to Juneau by boat. For Wilson meant to take the overland route this time from the mining-town of Juneau.

But he had never crossed British America, and had an idea that the journey through the United States to San Francisco would prove far less tiring to the ladies.

Wilson really proved himself a good general. And he did what every traveller should do before commencing a long journey to a foreign land: he kept a note-book by him night and day, — literally lashed himself to it, as sailors say, — and herein he jotted down every idea as it occurred to him, and the name of every article of the outfit that must be taken. He was unlikely, therefore, to forget anything that should prove really serviceable or tend to the comfort of his wife and friends; and even the dogs were not forgotten.

Of course, he showed his wife this note-book now and then, and she gave him many suggestions that proved ultimately valuable.

Well, the lighter articles of the outfit were nearly all purchased in England; and they found an immense saving by so doing. Other things were bought in New York itself and San Francisco, and odds and ends at Juneau, even.

Although anxious enough to get on, Wilson could not resist the pleasure of letting his crew, as he called them, have a peep at the wonders of New York. So he made a three days' stay in this splendid city.

The hotel was not only comfortable, but quiet and homelike; and instead of dining in the main room, they managed to get private apartments, to which even Towsie and Currie were not denied admission.

Wilson determined to leave nothing undone, to make the exceedingly long and somewhat hazard-

ous journey have all the charms of a picnic for Maddie and Leebie.

"We, boys," he told Ernest and Laurie, as they sat together in the verandah one evening, "could rough it. We are strong and hardy and cool. Moreover, we are temperate; and I think we are just about as brave as most Englishmen, or Scotchmen, either. But," he added, "women-folks *are* women-folks, you know. I am going to do, and am doing, just about all I know to prevent a breakdown."

"You don't fear it?" said Ernest.

"No, I don't fear it, because Maddie is strong and happy — oh, there is a deal in that! And our Leebie has all the expectancy, the dash, and the courage of youth to keep her up. Nevertheless, a harsh wind shall never blow on them, if I can keep it at bay.

"Well, boys, I don't really think that we shall be out a year, altogether; still, I have taken an outfit for two, and we shall take provisions, also, for two years. Maddie has chosen the rig-out — winter and summer — for herself and Leebie; and really, I must confess that it is not only comfortable, but even beautiful. I did not credit Maddie with such good taste, as regards fur garments and head-dresses, as she really has. Oh, she is really clever!

"But," added Wilson, "I did not consult her as regards clothing for you boys, and for myself. And those garments for which you were measured, and the material of which you left to my choice, you will find just the things for Klondyke."

"Yes, and Laurie, here, and myself wondered why you were so particular about a fit."

Wilson laughed.

"Because, my boy, I've been there," he laughed, "and happen to know that comfort is only gained by having garments that, though loose, fit well. We have all got working-suits of stout jean, with working-pants and boots. Yes, and I have laid in the wherewithal to mend these latter; for I assure you, lads, you will often have to be your own cobblers as well as your own tailors. Needles, thread, scissors, buttons, and all paraphernalia of that kind, I laid in while in London, with sweaters, socks and stockings, towels and toilet outfit, and even tents. These are easily and neatly packed in the waterproof bags, in which some sorts of easily damaged provisions will ultimately be stowed. We will procure more furs at Juneau or Dyea, where the Indians make and sell them; but I have taken out from England half a dozen eider-down quilts, and sleeping-bags, also. These last I had to have made. They are of waterproof canvas, lined with fur.

"Often and often have I slept out all night in these, even in the wildest weather.

"But I'm not done yet. I have no less than a dozen pairs of blue-glass spectacles to prevent snow-blindness. Pretty guys we shall all look with these on, I must own, but what's the odds, so long's you're happy?

"Then I have the best camera outfit that could be purchased in London."

"And guns?" said Ernest.

"Yes; I have a good rifle and good fowling-piece for each of us, to say nothing of revolvers; but these won't be needed, boys, for there is very little rowdyism, indeed, even in Dawson City.

"And I have some fishing-tackle. Not much, though, because the Indians can procure us all we want in that direction.

"But I'll tell you what I made a note of, before I left Klondyke to come home, and that was mosquito curtains. With these and Dr. Debrett's wonderful antidote, our lives will be a real pleasure all the way through.

"Well, I have taken a note, also, of all the tools we shall need; but these we can purchase where we buy our provisions, namely, at San Francisco."

While Wilson Webb was talking, Sir Duncan Currie was sound asleep on Laurie's knee, but honest Towsie stood by the speaker's side, with his chin resting on his leg, and gazing up into his face with loving intelligence, as if he understood every word that was said.

Wilson put his hand on the dog's head at last.

"No, my good Towsie, I haven't forgotten you, either. Yourself and Currie will have plenty to eat and drink, and far more fun and romping than ever you could have enjoyed in England."

Towsie heaved a sigh.

"And I have bought you and Currie a waterproof blanket, or jacket, each; besides towels, all for your-

selves, combs, and brushes, and, last but not least, a pair of strong, sharp scissors."

"And what may these be for?" said Ernest. "To pair their nails?"

"No, young fellow, but to cut away the hair between the toes, else it speedily gets balled in snow time, and the dog is then rendered sore-footed, lame, and useless."

Well, in course of time, our brave little band found itself safe in 'Frisco. Here Wilson received a hearty welcome awaiting from many old friends, and was obliged to stay nearly a week.

Here, again, Wilson gave proof of his good generalship; for, retaining only the food and things that were absolutely necessary for the overland journey from Juneau north and away to the gold regions, and for a month's stay at the claims, he had all heavy stores carefully packed and sent by sea to St. Michael's. They would be conveyed thence up the river to Dawson City, and met there by the young miners themselves.

They arrived, at last, in Juneau by boat, without a single adventure, and without encountering even a heavy sea, far less a storm.

But they met many a slowly melting iceberg, the cold breath of which told them what sort of a country they might ere long expect to come to.

The summer was far advanced, by the time they reached Juneau, but they hoped to arrive at the El Dorado in good time to begin the digging, nevertheless.

Juneau is a town on the mainland or level ground,¹ but backed by high mountains and certainly not devoid of the picturesque in appearance. A straggling sort of a place, which, with its whisky saloons, its dancing-halls and gambling-hells, put Wilson in mind of Dawson City itself.

However, there was no time to waste in criticising it. Northwards now on a very uncomfortable little steamer as far as Dyea. Maddie and Leebie had heard a deal about Dyea, and quite expected to find it a large and flourishing city. On the contrary, it is but a small trading-post up a creek, inhabited chiefly by Indians.

But these Indians proved to be very handy, indeed, and it was not very long before a bargain was struck with them, and they agreed to carry all the packages safely northwards as far as Wilson should wish.

To their credit, be it told, that though very far, indeed, from prepossessing, these Indians were hardy, strong, cheerful, and willing,

They had to be well paid, however.

Well, Lake Lindeman, or Lindermann, is about five and twenty miles from Dyea, over the terrible Chilcoot Pass.

It was not to be supposed that Maddie and Leebie could walk this trail.

Indeed, Wilson Webb had arranged that they should walk only very little, indeed.

He had brought a very large packet from San

Francisco to Juneau, and thence to Dyea, and when it was undone and fitted, lo, and behold! a very comfortable palanquin, not unlike those used in India, only far lighter and broader.

The two ladies could sit in this, side by side, and it was borne by four Indians on two long, light bamboo poles. Moreover, it could be shut up by windows on either side.

This contrivance, for the construction of which Wilson deserved no small kudos, was plentifully lined with furs and had pillows on which to rest the back and head.

Waggon and horses might possibly have accomplished the first eight miles of the zigzag road, that led along the banks of a brawling stream.

They were bound for Sheep Camp, where a halt is to be made for the night.

Both Ernest and Laurie found all their work cut out when they began the ascent up through the woods that grew on the rocky mountain sides. They were not really in proper Alpine form, and they were not Scots.

But they were brave young Englishmen, and far too courageous to think of complaining.

To Wilson, with his stout heart and his iron muscles, the task was as easy as it was to the Indians themselves; at some of the more difficult parts, more strength had to be bent on to the palanquin poles, and for this purpose loads had to be left behind.

With a stout stick in his hand Wilson walked

along by the side of the "palkee," talking and laughing with its occupants, both dogs keeping close to his side, as if on guard.

Indeed, neither Towsie nor his little companion, Currie, liked the look of these Indians, and told each other so.

"There is no saying, Currie," said Towsie, "what they mightn't do. They might throw them over a rock or run right away with them. Well, Currie, mind this: if I see anything suspicious, I'll give a bark, then we shall both attack in the rear. You are to go for their calves, because you're not big; but I shall fix my teeth in something higher up, and, my eyes, Currie, won't I make them squirm just!"

Well, there was little likelihood of those Indians running away with the "palkee" during the ascent, at all events; and so, after a hard struggle, they reached Sheep Camp, and here they determined to pass the night.

The Indians, who were accompanied by some of their squaws, had brought their own food and blankets; the "palkee" would be the sleeping-berth of the ladies, and the men-folks would pass the hours of darkness in their sleeping bags.

While Wilson prepared a warm dinner, cooked in real gipsy fashion, Maddie and Leebie, glad enough to stretch their legs, went for a stroll, accompanied by the boys and dogs. These latter were wild with joy, bounding over rocks and boulders, dashing into the woods, and disappearing as if they never meant

to return; reappearing again grinning from ear to ear, so full of joy and gladness that it made everybody happy to look at them.

Laughing and chatting gayly, our friends wandered on until they reached an eminence from which the view on either side was very impressive.

Away to the north and the east and north were jagged, serrated mountains, on the snow-clad summits of which the setting sun was throwing a glorious flood of crimson light, the shadows a pale, pale blue.

To the west was a cañon, and far away splendid glaciers. Southwards, when they looked beneath them, was the everlasting woods, but far away the tranquil ocean itself, asleep in the evening sunshine.

The silence was very impressive, broken only by the strange wailing cries of birds or beasts; they knew not which. Both dogs were panting and tired, and they, too, appeared awed by the silence and solitude of their surroundings.

They got back to camp just as the shadows of night were falling; falling and filling up the cañon and glens.

Sound, indeed, was the sleep of every one to-night. I may probably except the dogs, however, one of whom slept at each side of the "palkee," an arrangement suggested, I believe, by Towsie himself.

But ugly though they certainly were, those Indians were faithful enough.

Nevertheless, when our heroes were awakened next

morning before it was quite light, and found a bright fire of wood burning not far off, with a hissing frying-pan over it, for a short time at all events, while they rubbed their eyes and looked at each other, Laurie and Ernest would have given something to know where they were in particular.

The odour of that frying-pan was very inviting, however; so they quickly wriggled clear of their sleeping-bags, and then memory returned to them all at once.

CHAPTER XXIV

ON THE GREAT LAKE-CHAIN

"Hurrah! my lads, we'll build a raft,
A strong, substantial, sturdy craft." — ANON.

"Row, brothers, row; the stream runs fast,
The rapids are near and the daylight's past." — MOORE.

THE struggle over that wild pass, which commenced soon after breakfast, was a terrible one; and there is really no use in denying it.

For far over a thousand feet the climb was both steep and dangerous. Maddie and Leebie were now much too frightened to remain in the palkee, even if it had been possible to lug the contrivance to the top of the mountain, they being inside. It was, accordingly, left at a place called Stone House, with the heavier packages, as it took all the power the Indians possessed to assist the ladies and dogs up the fearful slope.

The Scots talk of "a stout heart to a stey brae."

Well, this brae was more than stey; and the word 'stey,' I may inform Englishmen, means steep multiplied by ten.

The climb was, moreover, somewhat zigzag, as the Indians took it, and at times steps had to be

formed. But it was really wonderful how bravely those girls bore up.

As for Leebie, I do think that she was far more concerned about the dogs, than about her own safety.

I must tell you how these last were got up. Dogs, as a rule, are bad Alpine climbers; so Laurie stopped at the top of the cañon until the Indians, after seeing Maddie and Leebie safe, had returned. Then, much to their surprise, Towsie and Currie were tied up, each in a sleeping-bag, and thus carried to the summit.

Were their trials and dangers at an end now? Nay, indeed; they were really but beginning.

There was six miles of snow to be crossed, and the wild descent to Lake Lindeman to be negotiated. Though there was but little wind blowing,—there always is a breeze on the mountains, by the way,—still the little there was made it piercingly cold. It was a cold that searched one to the very marrow; cold that no clothing could protect one from.

A long rest had to be made; and while Maddie and Leebie were glad to seek for shelter and warmth among their furs inside the palkee, Wilson took advantage of the halt, boiled water in a spirit-lamp, and made some beautiful coffee with essence and condensed milk. While they sip the warming and delicious tin mugful which Wilson hands to each, they talk of the terrible climb they have had; and no wonder they shudder a little as they think of it.

From the rocky walls called Stone House I think

I have guessed the ascent at about one thousand feet. I am told now it is nearly, if not quite, double.

The glaciers that towered skywards, precipitous walls of glittering ice, were really a grand but awful sight.

But now the long and dangerous descent to the lake was commenced. It was fully nine miles from the summit of the pass, and the greatest care had to be taken of the palkee, into which Maddie and Leebie had once more tremblingly ventured. This had in reality to be lowered down for a great part of the way.

To begin with, there was snow, but this soon got soft and slushy.

I am sure that during this fearful descent, Wilson was far more anxious than the occupants of the palkee themselves. The Indians kept it back with ropes from behind, while others walked in front, if walking it could be called.

But more than once our hero's heart seemed almost to stand still with dread, as the palkee showed signs of taking charge.

Had it done so, or had it once got way on it, its speed would have increased every moment. No power on earth could have stayed its fearful rush, and those above would have had to witness its complete destruction and the dashing to pieces on the rocks of its inmates.

When they reached Crater Lake at last, it was no wonder that Wilson breathed a heartfelt prayer of thanks for their safety.

Despite all danger and difficulty, however, after passing several other small lakes and fording a stream or two, Lake Lindeman was reached well on in the afternoon, and preparations at once made for going into camp for a few days. For a raft has to be built, so that this delay is inevitable.

It is usual here for Indians to return, but such strong, hardy, and willing fellows were they, that Wilson determined to retain their services for a time. And they made no objections, plenty of 'bacey being allowed them, as well as their wages.

Not far from the spot where our people rested was another camp, a kind of semi-permanent one; for here not only provisions but pitch could be bought.

Well, this last Wilson believed would come in handy, as he looked forward to having at least one boat to build.

It should be remembered that they had still about five hundred and sixty miles of a journey before them, ere they could reach, by the chain of lakes and by the Lewes River, which is really the head waters of the Yukon, the land of gold they were going to.

Just think of it, reader, as you scan these pages of mine! Nearly six hundred miles of one of the wildest countries it is possible to imagine, down streams, along lakes, through passes and rapids, through gloomy forests, where wild men wandered, and wild beasts too! As long this journey would be, or nearly, as from London to Aberdeen!

However, our party had one stroke of luck here at "tent-town,"—they found a boat for sale. The owner had overworked himself, taken ill, and died.

It is not supposed to be lucky to sail in a dead man's boat, but Wilson Webb was far, indeed, from being superstitious, and as the boat was a good one, very strong and newly pitched, he readily closed with the offer, and so two weeks at least were saved.

After they had got over the first fatigue of the journey, Maddie and Leebie here brightened up considerably.

They told Wilson that they did not mind the rest of the journey one little bit.

"I do believe," said Wilson, "that, after all, women are just as brave as men, or nearly so."

"Oh, indeed!" said Maddie, pouting, or pretending to, "and I believe that they are often much braver."

Her husband laughed.

"I confess," he said, "I was in a terrible funk as we were descending the mountain—and all for you children."

"Well, I'm sure," said Leebie, "that neither Maddie nor I were in the slightest degree afraid. It was just a sort of tobogganing, you know."

Wilson shuddered a little.

It would have been a fearful kind of tobogganing, he thought, had the palkee got beyond control.

One night as our three heroes were soundly sleeping in their bags, a terrible "hallabaloo" arose. Towsie and Currie had got hold of some wild beast

or wild being, and were doing their best to tear it to pieces.

The sound of worrying and the shrieks, roused every one, and Wilson soon wriggled clear of his sleeping-sack.

It was a lovely night, and so far north were they that scarcely was it dark now. Anyhow, there was a half-full moon shining clear in the west and stars twinkling overhead.

"Down, dogs, down! Down, Towsie! Currie, come here!"

Wilson was rushing towards the scene of conflict as fast as he could.

"Oh! ah! me deaded. Me too much deaded, foh true. Oh! ah! oh!"

It was a Chilcat Indian, and Wilson could see at a glance that he was not sober. Fact is, that he had crawled towards the utility box, as it was called, broken it open, and helped himself liberally not only to rum but to methyated spirit.

The spirit was warm enough, in all conscience, but when they found him, Towsie and Currie had made it warmer for him still. His compatriots also had been roused, and forthwith they tied him to a tree in a very unceremonious manner indeed.

"He a' righ' now, sah, foh true," said the chief; "to-mollo' mo'ning we squashee he ver goot. Damn!"

I'm sorry to put so bad a word in the page, but Quilquah spoke it with such force that down it had to go.

A very wretched Indian, indeed, was Kanuk next morning when dragged before his boss. He was never a beauty, but cringing and begging for mercy, he was worse-looking now than before. The bard of Avon tells us that

"Sweet Mercy is nobility's true badge."

He also tells us in words as beautiful as any in our language, that

"It is twice blest:

It blesses him that gives and him that takes," etc.

Well, I fear that Quilquah had not studied his Shakespeare. Perhaps it was not to be found in the lending library to which he belonged.

Anyhow, he displayed none of the qualities of mercy; for Kanuk was quickly tried and quickly condemned, and the execution of the sentence followed speedily after.

Kanuk was hurried away into the adjoining wood, and for the next few minutes, except for the shrieks that could be heard after the sound of every blow, one would have thought there were girls down there beating carpets.

Kanuk was finally ordered to take himself back at once to the coast, and his chief quietly requisitioned his pay, for his own personal use.

But now work began in earnest, and the making of a log-raft, strong enough to stand a voyage down the great waterway to Klondyke, was really no joke.

Never mind, with the assistance of the Indians,

rough, sizeable trees were cut down, lopped, and carried down to the water's edge. Here they were piled up, until it was believed that quite enough were got together.

Then commenced the building of the log-raft. Maddie and Leebie said they were sorry they could not help, but were assured by Wilson that they were entirely mistaken, as, if they chose, they could materially assist.

"Oh, do tell us how!" cried impulsive Leeb.

"Why, just by looking on."

Well, log after log was floated well out and lashed together, the first two being anchored.

It was weary work, and wet work too, for they had to wade into the water; and although it was summer, cold, indeed, did it feel in that lake.

The mosquitoes, moreover, gave them some considerable trouble, and Wilson Webb's prescription — that he had received from the Doc. — was in great request.

When one deck was built, another lot of logs was lashed crosswise over it, and even a third. It was now tried, but it was found that when weighted down with human beings, it was still too low; so a fourth deck was added, and when this was done, the raft was quite a serviceable affair and, apparently, strong enough to defy both rapids and rocks.

Lake Lindeman is only five miles long, and is joined to Lake Bennett by a stream hardly a mile long, but of very great rapidity.

Laurie, with a considerable deal of luggage, one Indian, and the two dogs, occupied the boat. The ladies were on board the raft, with Wilson and Ernest and all the rest of the baggage.

Now Laurie would have rushed the rapids, if he had not been persuaded not to by Quilquah. It was certain death, he assured him; so the boat was beached and skidded along to the next lake by the Indians.

Meanwhile Maddie and Leebie were told they had better land and take their places in the boat, as the danger of an accident was very real.

Ernest and Wilson had poles, it is true, but so fearful was the speed of the tumbling stream that steering was very difficult indeed.

They refused to go on shore, however, and soon the raft takes the plunge, with a rapidity, too, that makes every one's head whirl.

"Hold fast, Maddie! Hold fast, Leebie!" shouted Wilson.

He struck at a boulder here and a boulder there, as she went dashing on.

It seemed for a time that nothing could save her, and when she struck a submerged rock, from which the water immediately lifted her off, however, she shook and trembled like—as Ernest afterwards graphically expressed it—an old clothes-basket. Wilson expected that she would go to pieces.

But thanks to her sturdy build, she did not, and in a wonderfully short time she was rushed into

Lake Bennett itself. Here the raft turned round and round, like a tee-totum, giving those on board a kind of circular panorama of the wild scenery around, that was somewhat confusing to behold.

This Lake Bennett is the first of the chain of such sheets of water, joined together by streams much in the same way that the great Caledonian chain of locks is by its canals. We have first the Naves Lake, then what is called the Windy Sleeve, or Windy Arm, of Lake Tugish, then the real Lake Tugish, and following this, Mud Lake, sometimes called Lake Marsh.

Now this chain of lakes, with its connecting streams, is called the "still-water route." This is certainly misleading, for our party found the water very far, indeed, from being still; only there were no cataracts.

But terrific squalls were at times encountered, and twice the boat in which Laurie was had been all but capsized, very much to the terror of Maddie and Leebie on the raft. Had she gone down, he would have been drowned before their eyes. But their own danger was considerable, although they seemed to think little, if anything, about this. Even to run on shore on the muddy edge of a lake, would have delayed the journey for weeks.

The distance from the head of Lake Bennett to the lower end of Mud Lake is about seventy-three miles, and danger threatening the party all the way. In fact, owing to the suddenness with which dirty weather or squalls may come up, one can never feel safe on this lake-chain.

But at long, long last they are out of Mud Lake itself, and have entered the river Lewes.

On they sweep; somewhat more cheerily now.

Oh! but I do not want to give a wrong impression, and must admit that they were cheery most of the time; and when the weather was fine, when it was all plain sailing, as it were, many a capital song was started by Wilson, -- rolling sea or boating songs, as a rule, that well suited the scenery and the occasion. Maddie and Leebie never failed to chime in with their sweet, girlish voices, and Laurie himself drew nearer to the raft, that he, too, might join.

For, gliding on and on like this, in boat and raft, might be compared to sailing through life's stream itself. On that stream all our boats are floating, at present. We may not know, clearly, where we are sailing to, and storms may often arise, but we are happy, most of the time, and we are steering *all* the time by a star.

The name of that star is Hope.

The Indians that Wilson had still with him were now only two; the rest were paid off, and had gone back. One was with Laurie; the other, Quilquah himself, was acting as guide on board the raft.

"Now that the lakes are all behind us," said Maddie, "I am sure, Quilquah, our danger is all over."

"The twoof [truth] I talkee, Missie Maddie. Big lie all samee debbil. No muchee goot. We come plenty quick, now, to Pale Hoss Rapids. No fear, Quilquah plopah guide, foh twoo [true]."

The rapids the chief referred to were those about four and twenty miles down-stream from Mud Lake, at a place called Miles Cañon.

And the danger in rushing the stream here is very great indeed.

It is a case of minutes only, however, and is a great saving in time.

It must be confessed that Wilson Webb's heart beat high with anxiety, as he neared the cañon. Ernest crept nearer to Leebie, as if to protect her.

Laurie himself, in his sturdy boat, showed the way. He kept to the right, and was soon dashing on, and out of sight.

More slowly did the raft glide now.

But soon they are entering the fierce and awful current, that has swept so many brave fellows to death and doom.

CHAPTER XXV

AT HOME IN KLONDYKE — A BEAR ADVENTURE

"Oh, I hae seen great anes, and sat in great ha's,
Mang lords and mang ladies, a' covered wi' braws;
But a sight so delightful, I trow, I ne'er spied
As the bonnie blithe blink o' my ain fireside." — BURNS.

ALTHOUGH considerably short of a mile in length, Miles Cañon is, without doubt, a dangerous and fearful rapid.

The mountains here rise up into precipitous cliffs, forming a gorge or cañon, so that the river is narrowed till it is scarcely fifty feet from side to side; although above the dreaded rapids, it has a breadth of fully four hundred yards. The rocks at each side are dark and perpendicular. With the terrible speed on boat, or raft, even to touch these fearful walls would mean destruction.

It takes but five or six minutes to sweep through, but these seem hours, so great and fearful is the tension on one's nerves.

Right in the centre, or half-way down, is the White Horse Rapid, so called because the stream widens somewhat here, and is tossed back again, in froth and foam, from the narrow entrance to the

second part of the cañon, giving a fanciful resemblance to the mane of a wild horse. The foam is increased from the fact that the water dashes and curls around and over boulders, with a noise that is confusing, deafening.

Wilson will always believe, as long as he lives, that but for his forethought in taking the Indian "boss" with him, he never could have safely rushed these rapids.

Nor do I think he would attempt to do so again, with his wife on board, for all the gold in Klondyke.

* * * * *

But both boat and raft are out into the broad river at last, safe and sound.

To say that Wilson was grateful and thankful to God, would hardly describe correctly the state of his feelings. For some time, indeed, he would not have trusted himself to speak for a good deal, nor to glance round at his wife and Leebie. He just kept gazing ahead. Then he waved his hand to Laurie.

But as soon as he could swallow the big lump in his throat, he turned to Maddie, and said with assumed carelessness:—

"You weren't afraid, were you?"

"Just a little, this time."

"And you, Leebie?"

The girl's eyes were overflowing with tears, and when Ernest patted her hand, down they came fast enough. She made no attempt to hide those tears.

"I'm so glad," she said at last, "that Laurie is safe. I thought — oh, I thought we might pass his boat all smashed, and poor Laurie —"

She put her hands to her face, now, as if to shut out the terrible, though imaginary, picture.

Well, the rest of the voyage was comparatively safe and easy; but they encountered more than one squall; and one rapid, also, had to be negotiated, but after their fearful experience at Miles Cañon, it gave them but little concern.

Dawson City — and crowds rush down to meet them, to welcome Wilson back again, and wish the newcomers luck and joy.

Even Towsie and Currie had a part in that hearty welcome; and when they got their feet on shore I feel quite certain that there were not two happier dogs in Dawson City.

Well, in a place like this, with an ever-fluctuating population, one need hardly be surprised at anything that may happen, even in a few months' time.

Wilson Webb, therefore, was not astonished at all when among the first to greet him was Mr. Grimshaw himself, "the old man miner." He was looking very happy and jolly, indeed.

"We saw you coming down," he said, "and my wife set about getting everything ready to receive you."

"My dear fellow," answered Wilson, "I am, indeed, pleased to meet you. It is so unexpected, but, on the whole, so delightful. Now let me intro-

duce you to my wife and friends. We must not stop a day, however."

"Nonsense, Wilson Webb! nonsense! The boat will be in shortly and all your stuff. Remember you wrote and told me."

"Yes."

"Well, she isn't far down-stream. Come on, ladies; bring the dogs and all."

"Yes," he continued, as they walked towards a snug little bungalow on the outskirts, "me and my missus are done with Klondyke. We've done well since you left, and we've enough money now to set up house again in Chicago and keep finer horses than ever. Ah! lad, it will be our turn now, and I mean to make those pig-stickers, who turned their backs on us because we were poor, sit up. You bet! Ha! here comes Mrs. Grimshaw to meet us."

"And young John?" Wilson inquired when they had all got seated.

"Oh, he's up-stream. Claim is working fine again, and John will keep it on."

"And the Doc. and his wife?"

"Eh! dear, dear," said Grimshaw, sadly; "now you have struck a hard pan, my boy. Oh, what a weary world it is at best! But why doesn't death take the old ones and spare the young and the beautiful?"

"Death! You don't mean to say —"

"But I do. Poor Mrs. Debrett is buried not a quarter of a mile from where we sit. It was a terrible thing, and cast a gloom over the whole of Dawson

City. An accident, you know, and it happened not over a month ago.

"You remember the lad Jackie that she befriended?"

"I do right well."

"He is dead too. Died a hero's death, poor fellow. You see the Doc. was away for a day or two, prospecting. He always was restless, and, as usual on such occasions, Jackie slept in a tub among straw not far from Mrs. Debrett's log-hut door. He used to pride himself in being her guard and sentry. Well, one dark night Jackie was awakened by a wild, terrified shriek, and could see at once that the log-hut was in flames. He blew a shrill whistle he carried, to alarm the miners in the neighbourhood, and soon they came rushing towards the hut, to render assistance if they could.

"They found Jackie wild with grief and dashing himself against the door, which, being bolted within, all his strength could not force open.

"'Oh, my poor, dear mistress!' Jackie was crying; 'so kind and gentle, so good to wicked me!'

"A few blows from a pickaxe were sufficient to burst in the door, but a gush of flames and black smoke sent them reeling back.

"Jackie, however, did not retreat. On the contrary, he made a dash and a rush for the doorway.

"Heigho! he was never seen alive again. The hut—which they think had been set on fire from the explosion of an oil lamp—was soon a heap of

hot cinders, and in the early dawn the bodies of both Mrs. Debrett and Jackie, sadly charred, were dragged from the ruin.

"From the position in which Jackie lay, it was evident he had made an attempt to drag the poor lady to the doorway, and had fallen dead over her body."

"And my poor, brave friend, the doctor?" said Wilson. "Oh, I dread to ask about him!"

"He — he is gone."

"Dead, too?"

"Nay, lad, 'tis worse than death. His mind has given way. As often as not he is wandering among the woods and glens. No one knows how he lives, or what he subsists on. Only now and then he appears in camp to tell of wonderful gold finds in some creek or other, which has no existence save in his dazed and darkened brain. But it is sad to hear him sit by a log-fire among the miners and tell of the treasures he is going to carry back with him to far-off San Francisco, where he thinks he has left his wife."

"Heigho!" sighed Wilson; "that is, indeed, bad news."

"Poor Mrs. Debrett," said Grimshaw, solemnly; "there is some consolation in thinking that she could not have suffered long, nor could she have suffered much. And we have all to die."

This was Grimshaw's philosophy.

Well, in a place like Dawson City even tragedy itself makes but little lasting impression on people's

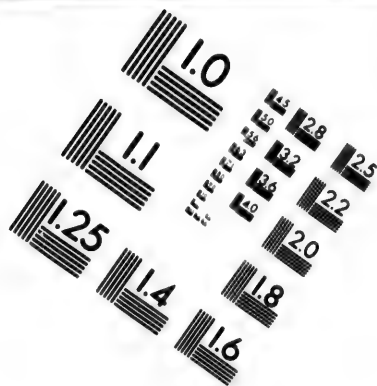
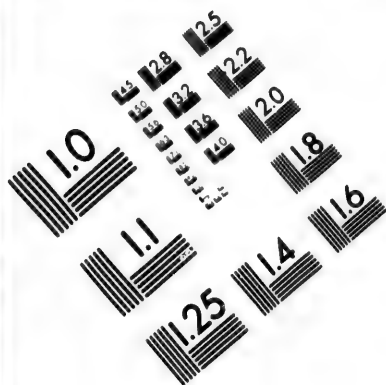
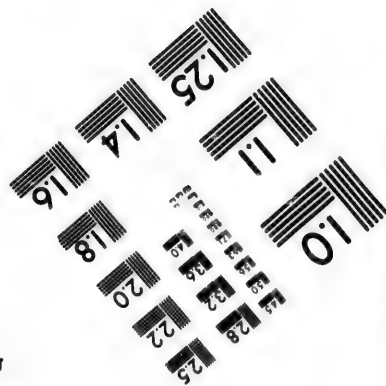
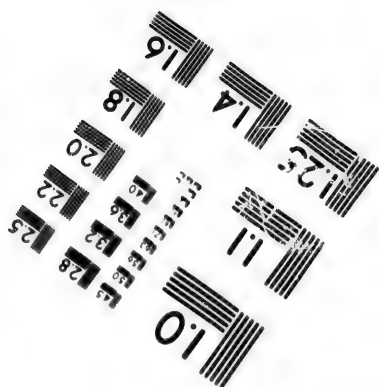
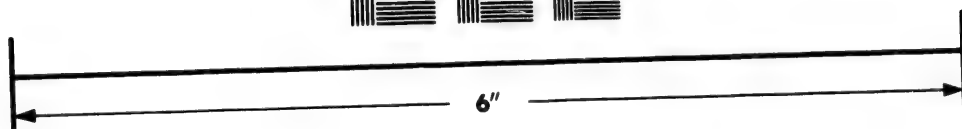
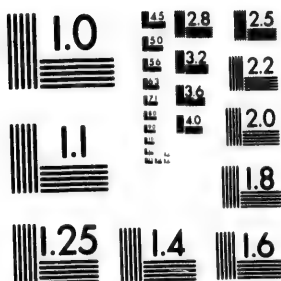


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minds, and Mrs. Debrett and her husband also were soon forgotten.

Not by Wilson Webb, however; for 'the Doc. and he had been very great friends, indeed.

But even now Wilson was not without some hope. No springtime, it is true, can e'er revive the ashes of the urn. Yet the Doc. might get well; that was the thought which helped to cheer our chief hero when he at last settled down with his friends in Klondyke.

There is nothing like work for curing worry, nothing like work for banishing grief and care, and now commenced a season of the hardest toil that ever Wilson had known.

And not only for him, but for Ernest and Laurie too.

All his traps and provisions, which Wilson had shipped at 'Frisco, had arrived safe and sound, and were stored partly in a hut built specially for them, and closely adjoining the three-roomed mansion, as it was called, and partly in a cache.

But there was a vacated hut to spare. This now belonged by rights to sturdy young John, because it was that in which his parents had dwelt. He himself preferred occupying the one-roomed shanty he had built himself, and so the boys, as they were usually called, were permitted to take up their quarters in the other.

Ernest had the good luck to acquire a fresh claim, and not only his but Laurie's turned out marvelously well.

I have not a stronger adverb than "marvellously" handy, else I should use it, because of all the claims in Klondyke those belonging to the boys were admitted to be the best.

The brief but warm summer had now worn to a close, and the mornings and evenings of the shortening days were already keen and cold.

The work all round went on as merrily as ever, notwithstanding.

And Wilson's party were as happy as any one could be in so forlorn a country, and with the prospects of a long, dreary winter before them.

The main room in the mansion was particularly cosy of an evening. It was large, and the fire that burned on the low hearth would have done any one's heart good to gaze upon.

This hearth was a triumph of Wilson's skill, energy, and engineering. It was laid with stone; there was a semicircle of stone and cement behind it, and the smoke and sparks found their way up a funnel and into an iron pipe or chimney, so that there was not the slightest danger from fire.

How different all this was from the miserable little iron stoves in other shanties, it would have been difficult to conceive unless one had seen both.

Well, it was the invariable custom for the boys to drop in after the evening meal, and join the magic circle around that cosy and homelike fireplace.

Sometimes young John came too. Whether he did

or did not, his seat and his corner were always reserved for him.

How were the evenings spent? Well, Wilson himself, being the oldest, was relegated to the easy-chair, and it was pleasant, indeed, to see him sitting there listening to the merry conversation, and occasionally taking his pipe from his lips and joining in. Sometimes Maddie, his wife, would bring the violin and place it in his hands, and however tired he might be, he never refused to play when she told him to.

Yes; the boys would be tired of an evening, but I wish to inform all whom it may concern, that there are two species of tiredness,—the nervous kind and the muscular. The first is far from agreeable; but rest soothes the latter, and this kind of tiredness is really rather pleasant than otherwise.

Well, "the girls" always had knitting and sewing to attend to of an evening, so until the early bedtime

"The time flew by wi' tentless heed."

It is no wonder, therefore, that everybody was as fresh as a mountain trout of a morning. And everybody had an excellent appetite too.

The days got shorter. But Ernest and Laurie continued to have their morning swim, and they determined to keep it up until they should be frozen out of the river.

This river or stream was several hundred yards away from their shanty; so after getting up and lighting the stove, in scanty attire they ran all the way

to their bathing-pool, and quickly undressing, plunged in.

The glorious feeling of exhilaration which they experienced after five or ten minutes of splashing and swimming, was worth a king's ransom. This last is merely a figure of speech; for, as a matter of fact, I have no idea what a king's ransom is, though some of the kings we read of in history, would have been precious dear at any price.

But early one morning, the two boys had a very strange adventure, indeed. Though it had its humorous side, it was none the less alarming.

The water on this particular morning was considerably colder than usual; for a high, nor'land wind was raging through the spur of the forest, in which their swimming-pool in the river lay.

It wanted nearly an hour to sunrise, but dawn was already spreading up in the east. The clouds banked along the horizon in the middle distance were dark and grey, but fringed with silver, while those far, far behind them were aglow with gold and crimson.

"I say, Ernest," said Laurie, "I'm going on shore. It is too cold for a long swim."

"Well, I guess I'll come with you. You are all over as red as a boiled lobster."

"Am I? And do you know what you're like?"

"No."

"Why, like a raw one, and that is worse."

"Wo-ah-rr-rr-wo-o-o-o!"

That line is really meant for music. I could not

write it in any other way. But I wish it to convey the sound of that grizzly bear's awful voice, as he stood on the banks of the stream, impatiently waiting for his breakfast to land.

He had made up his mind to breakfast off Ernest and Laurie, the boiled lobster and the raw one, and it was perfectly immaterial to him which he began on first.

"Oh, Laurie, look, look!"

"Oh, Ernie! Back, back! Let us swim downstream."

Truth to tell, they were both almost paralysed with fear, for as they swam the ferocious monster—the first seen this season—walked alongside the bank.

Perhaps he was not famishing with hunger, or he thought the water too cold to hazard a spring. Though he crouched more than once as if about to leap, he refrained.

How the adventure would have ended had not help been most unexpectedly at hand, I cannot say. Sir Duncan Currie generally went with the boys for a swim. On this particular morning, however, he had overslept his little self, and was late. When he dashed up to the stream at last, he took in the situation at a glance, and went straight for the heels of the grizzly, biting as hard as he knew how to.

With an angry roar, the brute wheeled and tried to strike the wiry, wee terrier with a paw. But the doggy kept out of his reach, only whenever Bruin faced towards the river, he renewed the attack.

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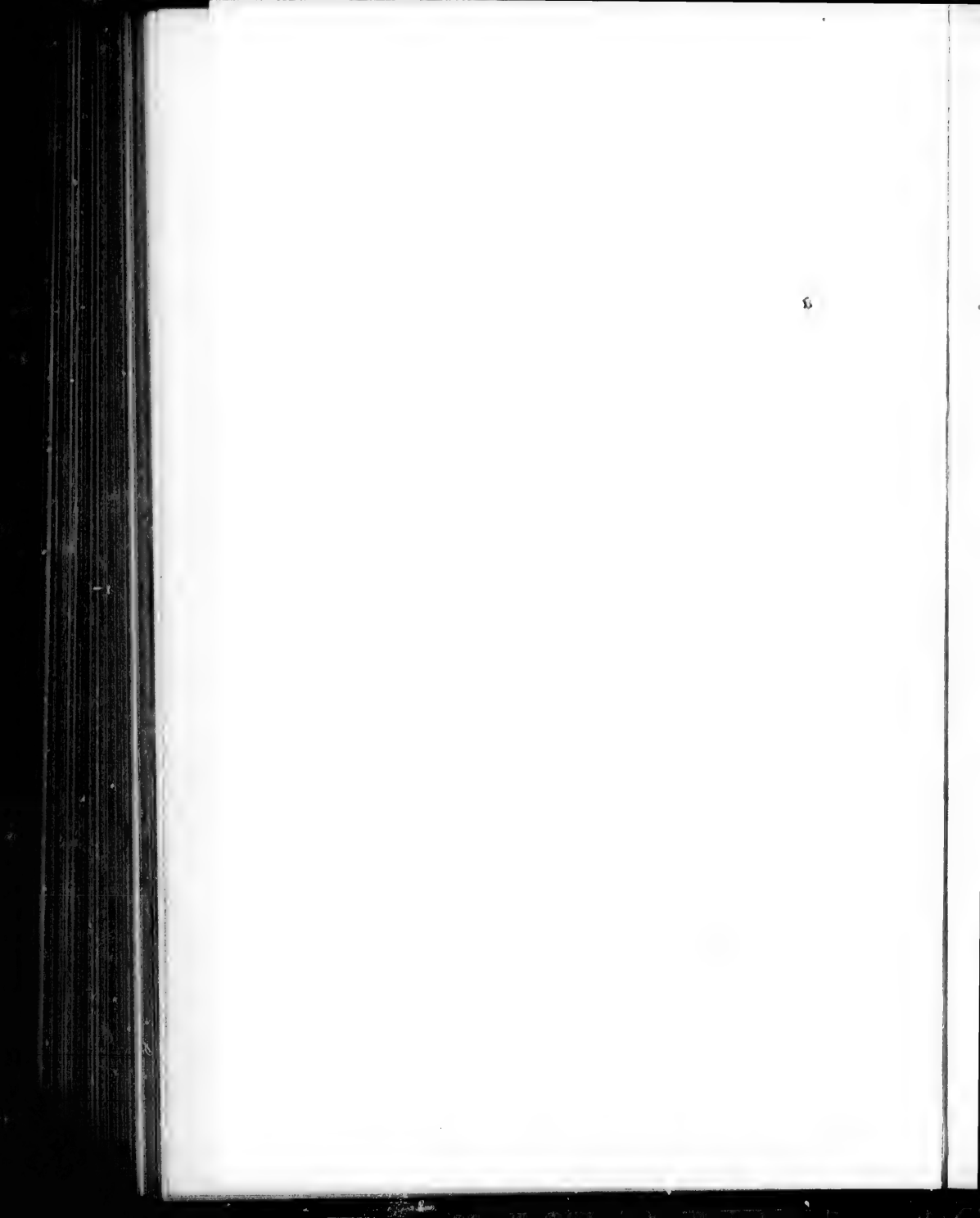
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HE WENT STRAIGHT FOR THE HEELS OF THE GRIZZLY.



This continued for many minutes, till the grizzly could stand it no longer, and, grumbling and growling, made off towards the hills.

An Aberdeen terrier chasing a bear!

It may be strange, but it happens to be fact!

The boys did not stop to dress. They gathered up their clothes and fled back towards the village; and as they rushed madly past some miners going early to work at their claims, the astonishment of the men may easily be imagined.

The sun soon rose, and shone very brightly down on hill and dell and woodland wild.

Little Currie had come back safe and sound, but all excitement. He seemed to tell the boys that he knew where Bruin had gone to cover.

When Wilson heard of the adventure, his very eyes sparkled with joy.

"Come on, lads! Get your guns! Come, Currie! A bear's ham is an excellent change of diet."

"Wowff!" barked Currie.

And so the hunt started.

Two hours after this, the bear was bagged.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE DAY WILL SOON BE ON THE TURN

"Stormy winter's come at last,
With winds and clouds and changing skies;
I hear the rushing of the blast
That through the snowy valley flies." — BRYANT.

"Now, boys," said Wilson, an evening or two after this, as he laid down his violin, "I believe I am still boss of the show."

"Oh, yes."

"Well, I'm going to exercise my authority. We have been here, now, a whole month, and our claims have all panned out splendidly, and I have taken over the poor doctor's, for he can never dig again, I fear. But, anyhow, you youngsters are working far too hard, and — look here — harder than you need to."

"Oh, Wilson," cried Ernest, "we want to make a pile, you know; and, really, the excitement is very great!"

"True, old man, and excitement *kills*, as sure as you are alive at present. If you go tearing on as you are now doing, for six weeks longer, you'll be down with fever, and won't have strength enough to fight it."

"Well, what would you have us do?"

"Why, give yourselves two good hours' rest a day."

"What, sit down and whittle sticks and whistle?"

"No, lad, not that; but shoulder your guns and your fishing-gear and be off to the hills and the glens. We want fish; we want more bear meat. Old hands tell us it is going to be a hard winter; and so, while keeping up your health and strength, getting good fun and excellent sport, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you are filling the larder."

"What say you, Laurie?" said Ernest.

"I'll go like a shot."

"So will I."

And so a series of almost daily hunting and fishing expeditions were inaugurated and kept up, too, until the early winter had fairly set in. Then they had to be abandoned.

But not before our young heroes had encountered one or two thrilling adventures that they were not likely to forget.

On these expeditions that poor little dear, wee, rough-coated tyke Currie was their constant companion.

"I feel it my duty," he seemed to say, "to look after you with so much danger about. Where would you be now, I wonder, if I had not destroyed that terrible bear?"

Yes, Currie was really convinced that he alone had slain the grizzly.

But, for reasons best known to himself, the bob-tailed Towsie preferred remaining in camp. Perhaps he thought that there were bad characters about, and that it was his duty to protect his mistress.

Well, while the young fellows were fishing, Currie used to be romping through the bush, doing a bit of mink or wolverene hunting on his own account, and refreshing himself now and then with a feed of raspberries.

One day while the terrier was away on the war-path—he could be heard yap-yapping in the distance every now and then—and the boys were fishing, with such success that they were actually covering the banks with living, leaping mountain trout, all at once, to their no small consternation, a huge black bear put in an appearance on the scene.

My own experience of bears has been chiefly among the large Arctic species, and I have had one or two narrow “squeaks”; but I have noticed that when a bear is very self-possessed he feels sure of his prey, whether it be a man or a seal.¹

Well, this particular bear did not seem put out in the slightest degree.

There was a cunning leer on his crafty face, and I'm sure he would have spoken somewhat as follows could he have spoken at all:—

¹ In the Arctic regions once we had a little ragamuffin of a dog who used to chase the white bears. He could do them no harm, but by biting at their heels he delayed their progress, and this enabled the rifles to get near enough. We called him “Brick, the bear hound.”—G. S.

"Hillo, lads! Hill-l-lo! Why, this is quite a pleasant surprise! Fishing, eh? Well, I've just been doing a little of that myself, farther up-stream. I've swallowed about two dozen, but la! what is that to a healthy young fellow like me. But don't let me disturb you!"

He had lain down to watch them, as a cat watches a mouse.

"I thought, you know," he went on, "that a bit o' fresh meat would help to make up a dinner for me; so, as soon as I got scent of you, I just came along."

Both boys were almost paralysed with fear, for a time. They had left their rifles, foolishly enough, far down-stream.

But they determined to sell their lives dearly, and defend themselves with their fishing-rods.

It was pretty evident that Mr. Bruin could not make up his mind, as to which he should spring upon first.

The delay enabled both to recover self-possession. Laurie suddenly remembered that he had in his pocket a very large and shrill dog-whistle, and a happy thought occurred to him.

"Ernest," he said, "slip off your coat quietly, and when I give a startling whistle, whoop as loudly as you can, wave the jacket, and rush towards the brute."

"Well," thought Ernest, "it is death anyhow, I daresay." So off came the coat.

"Aren't ye afraid of catching cold?" Bruin seemed to say.

"Are you ready, Ernest?"

"Ready, aye, ready."

Whew-w-w! went the whistle.

In Bruin's ears it was startling in the extreme; but when the jacket was waved, and both boys advanced with a wild whoop, his nerves couldn't stand it a moment longer.

He wheeled and bolted.

Then a new actor came rushing on the stage.

And this was Currie himself.

"Let us run for the rifles," cried Laurie.

And run they did.

They could still hear Currie barking and yelping at Bruin's heels, so they hurried on in chase. To their horror, just as they were within gunshot, the bear wheeled so suddenly that he downed poor Currie, and lay on top of him.

Never had Laurie fired a shot with more caution.

Yet, strange to say, he was cool the while.

The bullet struck the monster on the left shoulder. He started to his feet with a coughing roar, spitting blood and froth, then — he fell on his side, *dead*.

But the strangest thing of all was this: Sir Duncan Currie did not appear a single bit the worse.

He looked a little dazed, but soon recovered even from that.

"I killed that bear in fine style, didn't I?" he seemed to say as he trotted up to Laurie, laughing apparently all the way down both sides.

Laurie took him up in his arms and kissed his heathery brow, a dozen times over.

"My dear wee friend," he cried, "what *should* we do without you?"

"What, indeed?" thought Currie, though he did not say so.

Anyhow that black bear when it was got home made a very welcome addition to the larder. As did the fish also.

But it is not to be supposed that a little party of five or six could make away with a large animal like a bear, even in winter time when appetites were wholesome and meat kept long. No, but there were many men not very far off who had been unfortunate, and were already beginning to feel the pinch of hunger, and to these a portion of that meat was, indeed, a much-prized present.

Now I am anxious to give the gold fields of Klondyke all their due, as well as the brave fellows who worked there, and for aught I know do still work there; yet it would be far less than my duty as a writer of books that are meant not only to amuse, but to convey a little information, were I to leave the reader with the impression that every one who goes to Klondyke is bound to gather wealth.

Klondyke has been the ruin of many of those who were even able and willing to work and struggle.

For several sorts of reasons they have simply been unsuccessful. They have drawn blanks as regarded their claims; they have lacked patience and long

endurance; they have not come provided with the proper necessities of life, and so have starved first, and broken down afterwards.

There are many of such men in Dawson City, — some of them gentlemen's sons, who have gradually degenerated into hangers around bars or the dancing-saloons, and loafers.

Ah, me! it is bad enough to be poor in any city, but to be in a town like Dawson, and not to know where to turn for a dollar, or not to know when eating one meal, where the next is to come from, is pitiable indeed.

Still, many who went to the mines had no sand in them, as the Yankees expressively say; they were from the first inclined to loaf and be idle, and perhaps addicted to drink. How could such as these expect to get on?

Crime is hardly known high up in El Dorado, but once Laurie's little Currie guided his master to a gloomy spruce copse, some distance down a wood. For a time, although armed with his rifle and Ernest not far away, he hesitated to enter that dark thicket.

It was evidently no live beast, however; for the wise little dog, instead of showing excitement, sat down on his haunches, lifted his chin high in air, pursed his lips, and howled most piteously.

Then Laurie knocked aside the branches and crept in.

There lay a man on his back — dead.

His sightless eyes were turned upwards; there

was a large brown patch on the ground, made by the blood that had poured from a wound beneath the ear, and his right hand still grasped the revolver with which the deed had been done.

An unsuccessful miner! Ah! no one could tell his sad story. None here knew what his home life had been. But on his left hand was a diamond ring, and beside it a ring of plaited hair — bonnie yellow hair supporting two little golden hearts.

Easy would it be for me to weave a story around a tragedy like this. I refrain, and restrain even my imagination. The subject is a sacred one.

But another day, not far from B——, a body was found in the river.

Suicide was the verdict; but the simple court that held the inquest refrained from adding those idiotic words "temporary insanity."

Well, our hero Wilson, and the boys too, were as kind as they could be to unfortunate idlers, and gave some of them work at the diggings when they could be *approached*. What I mean is this, that many had been gentlemen at home in England, and were far too proud to take manual work from anybody.

But others there were who begged for it, their only wish being to raise as much cash as would take them back to America, or to their homes in Merry England.

One man who told Wilson he belonged to a good old county family in Kent, and who really looked a young fellow of education, worked for weeks and

seemed very grateful. In the end, he showed his gratitude in a way that was not very commendable. He stole about five hundred dollars in nuggets and gold dust and, decamping, reached Dawson City and was seen no more.

Wilson did not worry over this, but it taught him not to trust every one who was pleasant in speech.

But shorter and shorter grew the days, and it was evident that the winter was going to be not only earlier than usual, but harder. The bears now disappeared.

"What a blessing it is," said Wilson, one evening, "that we came prepared." And he added: "I really did not know which of you young ladies to admire most when you came to visit us at our claims. Nobody must ever tell me that fur hoods and parkas are not becoming; and I think that wolverene is just about the prettiest fur out."

"It does seem cruel, though," said Leebie, "to kill the poor little minks, or even the wolverenes."

"I think," replied Wilson, laughing, "it would be as well, Leebie, to lecture Sir Duncan Currie on the subject; for it is he who catches most fur."

Sir Duncan laid one ear forward when he heard his name mentioned. But he did not make any remark. I really believe that Sir Duncan kept very many of his very best thoughts to himself.

The claims continued to pan out well, but I fear I should be accused of exaggeration, if I told *all* the truth concerning the wonderful land of gold.

I have surely said enough to prove that it is energy and industry alone that bring fortune.

As the weather grew colder and the days got shorter, it saddened the hearts of not only the "girls," but our boys as well, to observe that many of the miners who had been only partially successful were now all but destitute of the necessities of life. These poor fellows worked on hopefully, however, at their claims, believing that luck would eventually take a turn. For some it did; for others it came not, and these at last stampeded to Dawson City.

But provisions of all kinds had there even already, reached almost famine prices, and many a one now repented bitterly ever having come to Klondyke at all.

Ernest and Laurie had, as we have seen, taken Wilson Webb's advice, and did far less work now, spending more time in taking wholesome exercise. They were young, very young, and they were strong too.

Well, the gold would keep. This was Wilson's reasoning: why kill themselves in winter by grubbing for that which could be got with far less toil and trouble in the lengthening days of summer?

They settled down to winter work, therefore, in the following fashion:—

There was but little daylight during December, only from an hour and a half to two hours, according to the state of the sky and atmosphere. Well, to make the most of this, they worked with lanterns

underground in the mornings and in the evenings, so that they could have all the middle part of the day for sport and amusement.

But in the earlier part of December they cut down wood on the braes, and conveyed it home in logs for firing. This was pretty hard work, yet they had the satisfaction of knowing that they were preparing to bid defiance to the worst kind of weather that could blow.

Their extra stores they had long since "cached," or placed in safes erected on poles. It was thus protected from the attacks of either bears or wolves, though the former sleep most of the winter.

Poor little wire-haired Currie still persisted in sleeping in a tub out of doors; but he graciously permitted Wilson to nearly fill that tub with wood-shavings and skins, and under these he quite buried himself. only giving voice when some beast of an inquiring turn of mind — a fox or a wolf on the war-path — came prowling round.

These wild beasts chose the darkest nights on which to visit the camp; and as it was no good attempting to get a shot at them then, a rifle was placed in the wall so that when Currie gave tongue it could be fired by Wilson, by simply pulling a string from the couch where he lay.

One shot was enough; the enemy fled, and returned no more.

But there were beautiful moonlight nights when it was light enough to obtain a shot, and either one

of the boys, or Wilson himself, would creep quietly out when Currie barked, and have a look around. Bruin had generally been the would-be burglar. At the commencement of winter, and in one month, no less than three bears were discovered up at the cache, endeavouring to claw it open; and each time one was shot.

"Come, men," Wilson said to about a dozen of men one night, at a meeting they were holding to discuss the question of shutting up their claims, and retreating down upon Dawson City. "We are all brothers here. *I* and my people have provisions for two whole years, and we are not going to see you starve. Besides, God is sending us a bit of fresh meat now and then, and even wolves are not bad tack when a fellow is hard pushed. Don't give up your claims; that would be ruinous! Better times will come — *must* come; and, my friends, don't forget this: the day will soon be on the turn."

The men — hollow-cheeked, glistening-eyed, and starving — stood up with one accord to thank and bless him.

Many could not utter a word, owing to the tears that were choking them, but all crowded round him, and the honest grip of each hard hand was proof enough of the gratitude that dwelt in their hearts.

CHAPTER XXVII

CHRISTMAS IN KLONDYKE — A TERRIBLE JOURNEY

“But pleasures are like poppies spread,
You seize the flower, its bloom is shed;
Or like the snow-fall in the river,
A moment white — then melts forever;
Or like the borealis race
That flit ere you can point their place;
Or like the rainbow’s lovely form,
Evanishing amid the storm.” — BURNS.

PERHAPS the glorious aurora borealis never shone and scintillated more beautifully above the wild hills and snow-laden woods of Klondyke, than it did on that still, starry night of December 25th, 189—.

As white as the sunlight at one moment, in quivering, snake-like ribbons and fringes, so close, apparently, that you might cast a salmon fly over it, as one does over the Dee, and the next moment flickering here and there in a flush of pale crimson, sea-green, or blue.

Not a sound was to be heard over all this strange land, save now and then the wail of a wolf, or sharp, ringing bark of a fox in the distance. Except for this, it was a silence that seemed preternatural, a silence that could be felt, and gazing skywards, although one might be mistaken, it was impossible not

to believe that the aurora did emit sound, partly hissing, partly crackling.

Well, anyhow, the light of the stars shone with but feeble rays through this light of the north. There was a new moon, too, but that was slowly sinking in the west.

No need of lanterns to-night, at all events, to guide those half-dozen brave and sturdy miners, who were making their way through the powdery snow towards the mansion.

It was Christmas night, and neither Wilson, his wife, nor Leebie were going to forget it. The girls had been busy for days making mysterious-looking cakes and a huge plum-pudding, with many other dainties, which a woman only could name.

The boys had been busy too; not only was there a tent added to the mansion, whereby its available space was extended, but the inside of both this and the largest room was decorated with evergreens, of which the woods around afforded a supply that would suffice to cover the walls of St. Paul's Cathedral itself, outside and in, and change its dome into a canopy of green.

But those evergreens behaved "funnilly," as Laurie expressed it. For at the end of the room farthest from the fireplace, they were hung with tiny icicles, from the melting of portions of snow, which it had been impossible to shake off. But these icicles had a decorative tendency, and sparkled with all the colours of the rainbow.

A dozen, in all, sat down to dinner. Well, that was better than thirteen, anyhow. The ladies sat nearest to the fire; not because they were colder than anybody else, but because they had to serve up the dishes.

I may mention, at once, that soup was not down on the menu. But fish was. And delightful they were. These splendid trout the boys had caught — Indian-fashion — through an ice-hole in the stream. Well, there was a splendid haunch of deer, brown, juicy, tender, and done to a turn. This was flanked by potatoes and hunks of brown bread, baked by Leebie herself. There was wild duck, besides, for those who liked them. Beauties they were, though not very large; and, mind you, those miners had brought healthy appetites to that Christmas dinner.

"Gentlemen," said Wilson, with a smile, "I shall carve these ducks as the young Scottish naval surgeon did some fowls that were placed before him.

"'Let every man tak' a birr'd,' he said, and so you must do the same."

Well, for vegetables, there were green peas and tomatoes; tinned, of course, for neither of these dainties flourish so far north, as yet. But I think that the cranberry jelly went well with either venison or duck. This jelly — honour to whom honour is due — was also made by Leebie.

The wine was coffee, with preserved milk.

From my own experience of regions round the pole, I can testify that good coffee is a far more

wholesome and generous stimulant than rum; and I've tried both.

"Perhaps," said Maddie, with a mischievous smile, "some of the gentlemen would prefer iced water."

But the very thoughts of this seemed to cause more than one of her guests to shudder.

Well, the crowning glory of this Christmas dinner was the plum-pudding.

Ernest himself hoisted this to the board, and, indeed, it needed all his strength to carry it. It was rich and brown and savoury, and though no holly graced its crown, a species of crimson barberry did duty excellently well instead.

I feel quite certain that the Prince of Wales himself — who, I am told, is rather partial to pudding — never enjoyed a more splendid or better-made pudding than this.

After this, more coffee was served, and then Scotch thistles were handed round. Each Scotch thistle, however, was of purest crystal, and contained a modicum of the purest Scottish whisky.

So ended the dinner.

But not the evening.

For now a wide circle was formed around the low hearth, on which more logs were heaped, and blazed and danced and sparkled right merrily.

I need hardly add that Towsie and bold Sir Duncan Currie were there, or that they had enjoyed their dinner as much as any one else.

"Upon the whole," remarked the terrier to his friend Towsie, "Klondyke isn't such a bad place after all, and even at home it ain't every day we get such a glorious dinner to discuss. What do *you* say, friend Towsie?"

Towsie sighed.

"I say that I'd rather eat a dry biscuit in our cave on the moor, in our own bonnie land, than pudding and venison here. Ah, Currie! we don't quite understand man and yet, as wise as we are; but, after all, I think that digging for gold, Currie, must be a species of madness."

"I'd rather dig for mink myself," said Currie, and then he curled up and went to sleep.

There was nothing talked about to-night except home.

And several of those miners had stories to tell of their former lives, that were interesting to a degree, but sad enough to boot. Nearly every one there had a mother or sister or sweetheart in the "far countrie," and their thoughts went out to her to-night.

And even the songs that were sung and the melodies played by Wilson Webb on his violin, had an air of sadness about them.

Never mind! That Christmas evening was a very happy one for all that, and not a heart was there, around that cheerful fire to-night, which did not beat high with hopes of brighter days to come.

* * * * *

I am so terribly sensitive that even while I write my readers seem to be around me, and I often feel I

have many things to apologise for. I feel just so at this moment, because of my inability to make the last part of this chapter as gladsome and cheery as the first.

But one's duty plainly is to describe things as they are, and at the risk of dashing the hopes of many who may have half made up their minds to visit this land of gold, I must say that the winter there may be not only a hard but a deadly time.

In what follows, then, you will find no straining after stagy effects. I shall be happy if simplicity marks my every sentence, though, being an Arctic man myself, it would be easy for me to make my descriptions very graphic indeed, without departing in the slightest degree from facts.

Still, I should premise few winters, even in the regions around the Klondyke and Dawson City, are so terrible as that of 189- was.

As early as October, high winds and biting blasts began to blow fiercely from off the Nor'land hills, and when it veered more round to the west, snow commenced to fall, in little pellets at first, no larger than grains of mustard-seed. But as the wind went down this was changed to big dry flakes, of a size such as we never see in England. I have myself seen such flakes — away up in Greenland north — as large as florins and crown-pieces.

As the frost was hard, and even the river frozen over, these flakes, lying loosely enough, soon accumulated to what is called a great fall.

For days and days after this a kind of blizzard blew. The sensation, when one attempted to go out of doors, was precisely like that experienced by a man who is out of form, when he stands under a cold shower-bath. One gasped and struggled. The ice-dust was choking, suffocating, and paralysing to the air-cells. The cold, too, was intense, and one had to grope one's way from door to door.

The saloons in Dawson City were brightly lit up all day long, and I do not wonder that hundreds of poor wretches sought for shelter, refreshment, and warmth within their walls.

The wind fell at last, and then the scene all around, might have been called dreary in the extreme. Nothing black, or even dark, was visible. The whole world was robed in its winding-sheet. Tents and even log-houses had collapsed, and many of the latter had been entirely covered over, so that the inmates had to be dug out.

In some parts the wreaths of snow—shaped like curling waves just before they break on a sandy beach—were so high one could scarce have touched their sharply defined upper edges with a fishing-rod.

But starvation reigned in Dawson City. The prices of food of all kinds were prohibitory except to those who had an abundance of “dust.”

Hunger alone is capable of making cowards of even brave men, but few, indeed, can withstand the withering, nerve-destroying effects of starvation and cold combined.

"Boys," said a Yankee, one evening, at the bar of Mac's saloon, "I've had enough of this. What say you to skip? It is little more than seven hundred miles to Juneau. It is true the journey will be a terrible one, for burdens must be borne; but, rather than leave my bones here for the wolves to pick, I'm going to try it."

The proposal found favour with scores, and so a stampede was resolved upon; and in two days' time five hundred men at least had crossed the frozen river, and were heading away for the far, far distant Chilcoot Pass.

They had hired Indians as guides and carriers. There was no thought of gold now. All they longed for was food and warmth and a chance of life.

They departed singing.

Yes, British courage or American is indomitable!

But mercy on us! what a fearful journey they had undertaken! Had they been all as strong as mountaineers, they could not have hoped to reach the end of it without sufferings and privations, the character of which it would be difficult, indeed, to exaggerate.

Shall we follow them in imagination? Better not, I think. But a man lives near me now who had made one in that thin dark line which, as he spoke in short sentences, every word stamped with the impress of truth, I could in fancy see winding its slow, sad way across snow-clad plains and frozen streams, round rocky boulders houses-high, through

lonesome frozen forests and over mountains bleak and bare and wild; poor fellows with frosted feet and lagging limbs, their faces pale, their lips a dusky blue, hardly looking where they went, hardly caring, indeed, seeing nothing but the snow or ice beneath their feet, happy only — if happiness it could be called — when night fell and they could creep into their sleeping-bags, cold and hungry as they were!

To sleep? Not all, for refreshing as sleep would have been in many cases, aching limbs and racking coughs banished slumber till far into the short hours, when it was well-nigh time to roll out and continue the dreary journey.

“But ah!” says my informant, “seldom of a morning did all roll out, and when we placed hands on the shoulders of those we thought were sleeping sound, we found the sleep was sound indeed. They were dead and stiff.

“We buried them, bags and all. Just covered them up with snow, for the ground was far too hard to open, even had we brought with us picks and shovels. The bears and the foxes would find them in spring, but this we could not help.

“So slow was our march that November itself was half through before we reached Marsh Lake, and the pass still lay in front of us.

“Those among us who were strongest sympathised with the weakly, as far as men in such circumstances as these can have sympathy or feeling. We helped the ailing along, anyhow, and we gave them a portion

of our own food allowance; we even carried them when too bad to walk.

"I mind well that one afternoon Nat Hunter and I were carrying a poor fellow between us. The day was a bitter one, with a high wind and driving snow.

"‘William,’ said Nat to me, as well as his half-frozen lips could speak, ‘we needn’t bother with this one any more.’

"‘Oh, Nat,’ I answered, ‘we cannot desert the poor fellow now!’

"‘Speaks well for your kind heart, William, but — he is *dead*.’

"So we covered him up as we had helped to cover so many, and then — well, then we lit our pipes.

"We left more than a dozen dead, on or near the pass, and when we dragged ourselves into Dyea at last, there were barely three hundred and fifty of us all told.

"For years and years to come our trail will be traced by bleaching bones."

CHAPTER XXVIII

SICKNESS AND SORROW — THE MANIAC DOCTOR

“O woman! in our hours of ease
Uncertain, coy, and hard to please,
And variable as the shade
By the light quivering aspen made;
When pain and anguish wring the brow,
A ministering angel thou!” — SCOTT.

A MINER arrived pretty early one morning at the mansion.

Wilson Webb and the boys had just breakfasted, and were getting ready their lanterns to go underground.

It was about the latter end of January, and the wind was blowing fierce and keen.

He was a hardy Cumberland man, and had already made his pile.

“Oh, good-morning, Spencer!” said Wilson.

“Good-morning, Mr. Webb. But I haven’t the best of news to give you.”

“Why, what is the matter?”

“Only this, — and it’s bad enough, — my pal dropped down-stream last night.”

“What — dead?”

“Ay, dead enough, sir. Don’t say a word to the

ladies. We'll get him under by lantern light, and they need never know.

"It was his heart," continued the miner, "accelerated, as a doctor would say, by starvation."

"But, my dear fellow, you must admit that we — my young pals and I — have been willing to share our very last crust with you."

"Ay, that you have! May God bless you for it! But I must be plain with you. These miners you have been so good to are British and American; and, being so, they are proud, and it is the very fact that you refuse to take their dust for the meat and flour, which causes them in their pride to keep away, and, in fact, to starve."

"Is that so, Spencer, really?"

"That is so really, sir."

"Well, then, in future, and till better days come round, I shall *sell*."

"Spoken like a hero, sir. Rather than hurt the pride of those brave fellows, you bury your own. Now I'll go and tell them."

It was evident he had done so; for when daylight came, more than a dozen gaunt and hungry men found their way to the mansion, received tinned and other food, paid for it like men, and went away contented.

But Wilson had told each and all of them that, though he had consented to take "dust" for the stores from the cache, all deer or wolf meat and all fish caught must be accepted as gifts.

And the men agreed to this, without a single dissentient voice.

No more hands died of actual starvation, but long before that weary winter ended, five more graves had to be opened, to receive the bodies of men who had succumbed to the awful cold and to chest complaints.

Most of these had been nursed to the very last, by either Maddie or Leebie.

So kind hands had smoothed their dying pillows.

But what made several of these death-beds all the more affecting was, that towards the end the poor fellows imagined that they were being nursed by a sister or mother.

"Hold my hand, Jeannie," said one poor young Scottish lad.

Leebie took the hand in hers; and a thin, thin, cold one it was.

"Mother isn't here. But tell her, Jeannie, — tell her that — I died happy — *so* happy; and that I'm going to land where gold is never needed, — a land, Jeannie, where there is neither cauld nor care."

There was a smile on his pale lips; but the eyes rolled upwards, the eyelids drooped, and Leebie knew the end had come.

Spring returned. The days grew longer, brighter, clearer. And though floating ice came down the stream, no more snow fell.

Bears that had slept most of the weary winter through, in caves far away among the hills, awoke, ravenous and hungry; and came lower down to seek

for meat or fish. They were sometimes seen gnawing the bark of trees, or eating the greener twigs.

But foxes and wolves went farther off.

One day Ernest, with Currie, had gone to the woods in search of a black Mr. Bruin which, after very cautious stalking, he managed to kill. But in returning, he found in a sheltered corner some sweet, wee wild flowers nodding to the gentle westling wind, and pulled a bouquet for Leebie.

And, as he gave her the flowers and received thanks, he told her that he had seen a bird, and heard it sing.

"Oh, then," cried Leebie, "spring is indeed come, at long, long last."

"I would not go so far as that," said Ernest; "but, Leebie, spring *is* coming!"

Perhaps Ernest lingered a little longer than usual that morning beside Leebie. So true is it what Tennyson has told us, that

"In the spring a livelier iris changes on the burnished dove;
In the spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts
of love."

Well, one day, about a month after this, a party of strange Indians arrived at the camp, dressed in fur from top to toe. The Indians were strange, but stranger far the story they had to tell.

There were seven of them in all, and from the bows and arrows and other arms they carried, it was evident they were on a hunting expedition.

The chief, or "boss," could talk a little English, having been guide many times, he told Wilson, to white men who came with fire-sticks from the "much big water."

They were a tribe of wandering Indians, but their real home lay at a village near by a lake, to the southward of the Blue Mountains, and not far from the banks of Big Salmon River.

Now, although Wilson Webb had not said a word to the boys, or to any one, for many a long month about poor Dr. Debrett, it was because he believed him dead.

The unhappy Doc. had just disappeared and come again no more. "Long ere now," Wilson had told himself, when thinking about his dear old friend but a day or two before the arrival of these Indians, "he must have fallen an easy prey to bears or wolves, or been drowned in some raging torrent."

But what the Indian chief told him at once raised hope in his heart.

A strange white man, with no fire-stick, had one evening arrived "mooch sick and plenty mooch tire," at the Indian village of Kwea-a-chi.

The Indians had taken pity on him, and given him flesh to eat and wild honey, and shelter in the biggest tent; and so he grew well by degrees and lived amongst them.

From the chief's description of the strange white man, Wilson Webb felt certain and sure it was none other save the unhappy doctor.

"Was there anything strange in his manner?" he asked.

"Yes, yes!" cried the chief. "He speak mooch to self. And he talkee, talkee, sometime all night, to good spirits. No, no, we not see. On'y white man see spirits foh true."

"Boys," said Wilson, "this is my friend, the doctor, and I am going to find him, living or dead."

"Then we shall go too!"

"No, lads, no. Here you must stay and work your claims, and see to mine, with hired labour. I shall take just one friend with me, and that is little Currie. These Indians shall guide me."

Great, indeed, was Maddie's distress when she heard Wilson's resolve.

She shed bitter tears, — for never yet had they been parted, — and begged to be allowed to accompany him.

But this her husband would not hear of.

"The danger is nothing to me," he said; "but small though it may be, and few even the hardships I shall have to encounter, compared to that we have gone through together, I shall be ten times more happy and hopeful if you stay at home, darling. And I shall always be buoyed up with the thought that you are praying for me."

So Maddie dried her eyes at last, and tried to be brave.

Wilson started the very next day, simply with his gun over his shoulder, and Currie trotting at his heels.

Currie had kissed Towsie before he departed.

"I don't know where on earth we're bound for," said the brave little terrier, "but of course he couldn't go without me. I'll take good care of him, Towsie, even if I have to kill an Indian or two, and the usual amount of bears and wolves."

It would be foolish, indeed, to attempt to minimise the dangers of this long journey towards the Blue Mountains. Only a man in the best of health and strength could have accomplished it.

Wilson had more adventures than would suffice to fill a good-sized volume. The Indians carried all his traps, provisions, and so forth, and of course acted as his guides. But there were streams innumerable to ford, some of them dangerous in the extreme, from the fact that the shallows were usually but a little way above rapids and cataracts, and slipping or falling would have meant certain death.

There were wild cañons — beast-haunted — to traverse, high hills to climb, where our hero had literally to hang on by the toes, and dark gloomy forests to penetrate and pierce.

But the Indians were faithful. Wilson gave them plenty of tobacco, with the promise of much more, and many blankets besides, if they should guide him safely back to the camp of his friends.

Five long weary weeks were spent before they reached the village where the white man lived.

It *was* the doctor. And yet how changed! The long beard he had grown was sprinkled with grey,

his hair as white as the snowy peaks of Toon-dah, his cheek-bones high, and his dark eyes glittering with a light which the Indian guide told Wilson the spirits had put there.

"Debrett! Charlie, old man, don't you know me? Don't you know your old friend Wilson Webb?"

The doctor's gaze was on the far-off forest yonder, that went straggling up the mountain's side. He seemed to see nothing else.

"Poor Wilson Webb!" he said slowly. "Yes, he is in the cowboy country, and Dr. Debrett — I did used to know him, but he never writes now — never writes."

"Well, my friend," said Wilson, "you shall come with me to-morrow, and I will bring you back to Dr. Debrett."

The Doc. just turned his back and walked away towards his own hut, the Indians everywhere standing aside to let him pass.

For men in this state of mind were looked upon with a reverence that amounted to awe by these poor savages. They were supposed not only to commune with spirits, but with the Great Spirit himself.

From the tall, hideously grotesque images that stood here and there in this Indian village, their religion seemed to partake of the nature of devil-worship, and Wilson thought he discovered evidence of even human sacrifice. But of this he was not at all certain, and I myself am inclined to doubt it.

Dr. Debrett went slowly away, and sat quietly down on the sunny side of his own hut, which was

covered with skins, lined with skins, and probably the most comfortable in the whole village.

Wilson sat down beside him, but the Doc. took no notice.

Only he could be heard muttering to himself, now and then :—

“Dr. Debrett? Dr. Debrett? Didn’t I used to know the doctor once upon a time, ever, ever so long ago? And wasn’t he married? Oh, yes, a charming little wife. Died—a terrible accident. And I—yes, I was as much grieved as Dr. Debrett himself. Strange that *I* should have taken it so to heart. Strange—strange—strange!”

Wilson was very much pleased when he found that, with only two Indians to act as guides, he could dash down the river all the way to Fort Selkirk, and so on to Dawson City itself.

But as there would be some portorage needed at cataracts, another big canoe, with five Indians as its crew, was got ready.

Everything was prepared in a single night, and early next morning, much to the sorrow of every one in the village, Wilson and the Doc. departed. He suffered himself to be led down to the river, as quietly as a child would have done.

Then the voyage was at once commenced.

The river was a rapid one, at some places extremely so; but the rowers were exceedingly expert, and knew the stream in its every feature.

At times the boats dashed on with inconceivable

speed; at other times it was considerably less, but never slow.

Yet there were many places at which the guide called a halt, and at these the canoes or boats had to be landed and hauled along the banks.

This was no easy work, when the sides were steep and rocky, though, much to Wilson's joy, Debrett himself gave assistance, in a mechanical sort of way, however, as if he had been some wonderful piece of automatic machinery.

Still, there was a ray of hope in this.

At times Wilson Webb tried to draw him out, but it was evident enough the poor fellow's memory was, for the time being at all events, completely gone.

Under other and happier circumstances, and with other company, that voyage down the beautiful river would have been all one long and pleasant picnic.

It was summer now, and the woods and lower hills were very beautiful, and the wild flowers bloomed all along the banks of the river or clung to the rocks in great patches or curtains of snow-white, blue, and crimson.

Anxious though he was to get home, Wilson would often make his Indian rowers lie on their oars, that he might listen to the gush of bird melody which everywhere filled the air.

Dawson City once more!

And Wilson lost no time in hurrying on to his camp and claim, hoping to find all well, as, assuredly, he would find a welcome.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE CLOUD HAS LIFTED

"Music that dwells
Lingering, and wandering on as loth to die ;
Like thoughts whose very sweetness yieldeth proof,
That they were born for immortality."

— WORDSWORTH.

YES, everything *was* well, and Wilson Webb could not help thinking it was really worth his while to have been so long away just to receive so happy a welcome, and such evidences that there was one being who loved him better than all the world, and that was Maddie.

But the only words she could utter were, "Oh, Wilson !" Then she flung herself into his arms, and cried.

"I've had such a long and weary time," she said, when at last she found speech ; "and I've had such dreams, I will never, never let you leave me more."

When he led Maddie into the house, Wilson seemed suddenly to recollect himself. He gazed anxiously around the room.

"Dr. Debrett?" he said ; "Charlie? Is he not here, and did he not come in?"

He waited not for a reply, but went hurrying out again.

No one, not even the Indians, seemed to have noticed which way he had gone.

But some instinct—for reason, alas! had fled—appeared to have guided the poor Doc. to the heap of charred wood that had once been his happy home; and there Wilson found him, sitting on a half-burned log of wood. His hands were pressed over his face, and, while his chest heaved convulsively, the tears were gushing through his fingers.

Wilson was no doctor, yet he had been told that the insane never weep. He looked upon what he now beheld, therefore, as a good sign, and simply sat beside his friend and watched him.

At last, with a long-drawn, broken sort of a sigh, he looked up.

Then he stretched out his thin cold hand towards Wilson.

“It was there,” he said, pointing to the ruins; “just there. The tragedy! The fearful tragedy!”

Even these words caused Wilson’s heart to beat high with hope.

“Poor Debrett! Poor Charlie!” continued the Doc.

Then Wilson’s newly awakened hope died suddenly away in his heart, for his friend had evidently lost his own identity, and fancied himself some other man.

And yet he was so very gentle withal, and

appeared grateful, indeed, for every little service done him, whether by Maddie, Leebie, or Wilson himself.

I have said that our hero was no doctor, but he was a man of common sense, and, with all due respect to the noble profession, to which I have the honour to belong, common sense is a quality not possessed by every medical man.

Wilson had a happy thought! He took his poor friend by the hand and led him back as if he had been a little child.

Then he called the chief Indian guide.

"Chee-shoh," he said, "you know the white man well?"

"Yea, yea, and *net-ee-nee thun* [I love him]."

"Well, I will give you many more blankets and much tobacco, if you will stay here for some months and take care of him."

"I stop—I stop!" cried Chee-shoh. "I stop plenty long."

And so it was arranged. A spare hut was specially arranged for the doctor, and this would be his quarters; for Wilson determined that he would take his friend back with him as far as San Francisco, and there find him a home.

It was all very sad, he told Maddie, "and yet, oh, dear," he added, "it may be all for the best; and the loss of memory in a case like this may really be a blessing in disguise."

And now all claims were worked with energy.

The doctor's turned out well, and even the gold that had been buried in the ruins of the hut was recovered; so that the poor man was very far, indeed, from being a pauper.

Every evening Wilson took his violin and went across to the doctor's hut. At first, he hardly seemed to hear the music, so distrait was he, but gradually it seemed to creep into his very soul; and now he used to listen with rapt attention to every bar and slide and chord.

I think that the mystic power of music, as a mental medicine, is hardly yet fully appreciated by the profession.

It must be music, however, that shall be in perfect accordance with the spirit of the listener. It must be

“The still, sad music of humanity” —

music not necessarily melancholy, yet not too bright.

Wilson used to play with the mute on. It sounded ever so much more soft and sweet.

Sometimes, as he played, tears would course silently down his poor friend's cheeks. Though something assured him that this was a hopeful sign, he took no notice, but just played on.

But one evening Wilson Webb tried an experiment. It might have been a rash one, nevertheless.

He played, low and sweetly, that charming old song, “Ever of thee.”

It had been a great favourite with Lilla, his young

and beautiful wife, and Charlie never used to tire hearing it.

“Ever of thee I’m fondly dreaming,
Thy gentle voice my spirit can cheer ;
Thou wert the star so mildly beaming,
That shone o’er my path when all was dark and drear.

“Still in my heart thy memory I cherish,
Every kind thought like a bird flies to thee.
Ah ! never till life and memory perish
Can I forget how dear thou wert to me.
Morn, noon, and night, where’er I may be,
Fondly I’m dreaming—ever of thee.”

A very sweet voice had Wilson Webb ; and as he played, he sang over his instrument. And from his eyes some tears had fallen, so that even when the music in sweet, sad cadence died away, he did not look up immediately, for his sight was blurred and misty.

When he did at last glance towards his friend, he noticed that a change had come over the poor fellow’s face, such as he could not have believed possible.

That was no longer the countenance nor the eyes of one insane, but that of a clear-minded, thinking, reasoning being. A grief-stricken countenance, nevertheless.

He held out his hand ; and with feelings that he could not himself have described, Webb grasped it.

“Oh, Wilson !” said the doctor, “the cloud has been withdrawn. I am myself again. But tell me, dear friend, how long have I been *ill* ?”

“A whole year, Charlie. One long year !”

"Ever since that awful night when I lost my poor wife?"

"Ever since then."

"But tell me the story, for all the past since then till now is a blank."

And Wilson told him everything he knew, — about his sudden disappearance, about his being considered dead, about his life among the Blue Mountain Indians, and his (Wilson's) going to bring him down the river.

"My dear fellow," said the doctor, "I owe my life to you. The cloud has lifted, but it leaves me plunged in grief."

"Ah! Charlie, friend, *she* is in a better world. Do not grieve for her. You would not bring her back, surely?"

"I would not be so selfish. Our married life was brief; but oh, it was happy! My only regret is that I did not die instead of Lilla. And now," he continued, "you must stay with me, Wilson, just a few hours longer, because I would sleep. I may sleep many, many hours; but do not wake me."

As he spoke, he partially undressed, and crept into his cot under the mosquito curtain.

"Play now, Wilson," he murmured. "Play and sing that sweet, sad song again."

Wilson gladly did as he was told; but long before he had finished, the gentle rising and falling of his patient's chest, told him that sleep had claimed him as its own.

Wilson rose now, and whispered some words to the Indian nurse ; then he left the hut and stole quietly away to his own house, to tell every one there the joyful tidings.

But he returned again to the hut, and both he and the Indian watched beside the sleeper all night long.

Yet scarcely could it be called night at this season ; for hardly did the sun go down, and scarcely ever did the wild birds cease to sing.

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CHAPTER XXX

CAN THIS BE DEATH?

"How wonderful is Death!
Death and his brother Sleep." — *SHELLEY*.

"Get up!" cried Jack, "let John sit down,
For we are homeward bound." — *Old Song*.

TIRED out at last, Wilson Webb sank into a kind of doze in which strange dream after strange dream chased each other through the regions of his fancy.

How long he slept, he never knew. It may have been for hours, but he was awakened at last by a dream that partook almost of the nature of a nightmare. He thought he had been wandering in a forest, dark and deep, when a shadow fell between him and the light. He was flying now from something, he could not tell what, but, as in dreams of this kind, his limbs refused to bear him, and he sank down, the shadow darkening over him. Then beside him he saw the dead body of his friend the doctor, and, as if beckoning his spirit away to happier lands, a being whom he speedily recognised as Lilla, but far more beautiful even than she had been in life. He heard strains of dulcet music, too, and

caught such glimpses of a far-off happy land as mortal eyes seldom are permitted to behold.

He started up now, wide-eyed, gasping, and perspiring at every pore.

Then a sickening terror took possession of him. The doctor was dead! So still he lay, so pale he was, he could not be alive!

There was not a movement in his frame. The lips were slightly apart, but no breath seemed to come therefrom.

Wilson placed a finger lightly on his pulse.

"Thank Heaven," he said, half aloud; "he still lives."

"He go now to de spirit land plenty mooch quick." This from the Indian.

"I fear so," said Wilson, sadly.

There was no thought of mining that day, as far as Wilson Webb was concerned.

Either he, Maddie, or Leebie sat beside the sleeper all day long.

But towards evening Laurie, who had been on watch, brought glorious news to the mansion.

The doctor was awake, refreshed and quiet. He was sitting up, moreover, and had asked for food. Wilson hastened to the hut, and found the good news true. And from that very hour the doctor's recovery dated.

He was naturally weak, and, moreover, he mourned, as only a sensitive man can mourn, for *the* one being that had been so dear to him; who had been lent, as

it were, for a brief space of time to bless his life, and then taken away.

"Wilson," said the Doc., about ten days after this, "I'm drifting into low spirits and despondency. Now, this must not be. I must prescribe for myself what I should order for any other patient — *work*."

"Are you strong enough?"

"I'll get stronger every day."

And so the Doc. started work in his mine that very forenoon.

"Grief," says a well-known author, "is the parent of fame."

This is certainly the case at times, so I believe; but one thing is sure enough, namely, that honest work will banish grief. It has a healing action on the brain. And this was well exemplified in the case of Dr. Debrett. Not only did he get stronger in body day by day, but in mind as well, and, to all appearance, he was, in a short time, the most quietly happy man about the camp.

* * * * *

The summer had brought swarms of fresh men, and some women as well, to the regions about Bonanza and El Dorado.

And greatly disappointed men most of these were. They had really come here with the idea that they would find gold lying about like "chuckie stanes" (pebbles), and that they should only have to gather it and go home again. But now, lo! they

found every claim taken up, and no chance of getting in anywhere. And, alas! scores of these "green Englishmen" had sold everything they possessed in the old country to come out here, and now were almost totally without the means of subsistence.

It was very sad.

Several went prospecting far afield. Men of stern resolve these. True Britons, who would dare all to live, or failing, die. Some were successful, and found gold in abundance.

But others there were who got soon discouraged, and, being poorly fed, lost heart altogether, and, finally, found their way to Dawson City, there to work at any odd jobs they could find to do.

One could not but feel sorry for these poor fellows. They had sailed away from England or from Scotland so full of hope and assurance of the wealth, and with it the happiness, that a few short months would bring them.

And now to be so rudely awakened from their pleasant dreams, to the stern realities of a life not worth living; to cold, to hunger, to misery, and, as often as not, to sickness that was but the forerunner of early death.

* * * * *

Well, as the summer wore away, instead of the influx of gold-seekers getting less, it really increased.

And they seemed to come from all directions; at any rate, they did not all come up the great Yukon. No, nor down it, either.

And many of the newcomers seemed wealthy—that is, well-to-do.

"I came here to win," one of these told Wilson Webb.

"And I."

"And I." This from several others.

"Ya-as," drawled a somewhat sallow and lank Yankee, who was smoking a cigar as big as an umbrella when it is neatly rolled up,—well, more or less, I mean,—“ya-as, sir; I've been in gold mines before, and digging, in my 'pinion, is just like advertising—you want to keep on at it persistent-like, if you are to make a pile.”

"That's true," the others assented.

"But now here we are, and we've got to go prospecting. Worse luck! Made sure we'd find claims here to be almost given away.”

"Well, gentlemen," said Wilson, "if you really want to buy into some good claims, and if you can pay—"

"We *can* pay.”

"Call on me to-morrow at the mansion, say by twelve o'clock. Mind this. I don't promise, positively, that there will be claims for sale. I only just *think* there may be four.”

"Hurrah! We'll be there.”

That same evening after supper, when the doctor, Ernest, Laurie, and all sat round the fire, Wilson Webb made a little speech.

Speech-making was not much in his line, only this was a special occasion.

"Friends," he said, without getting out of his chair, "we've been here a long time, now, and taking the one thing with the other, I think we've been precious lucky."

"Hear! Hear!"

"Well, I, for one, have made my pile. Twice or thrice I've added considerably to the treasure-ship's cargo. You boys have also done fairly."

"True!"

"And my dear Doc., yours has lately worked splendidly."

"That's so, Wilson."

"Well, much though I love Klondyke, I'm going to leave it. The winter is but a measurable distance ahead of us, and owing to the famine of last dark season, I doubt if we have enough food left to take us through another; so I'm going to sell out to-morrow."

"But *can* you?" said the Doc.

Then Wilson told them of his meeting with the speculators, and of their intended visit next day to buy claims — if they could.

Well, although Wilson's proposal was thoroughly sifted and debated, it was finally agreed to unanimously.

So when the speculators arrived next day, they found four capitally going claims for sale.

But not for nothing.

No; Wilson Webb was a business man, and when he was offered what he considered an insignificant

sum, he coolly lit a cigar and addressed the men as follows : —

"Gentlemen," he said, "I really took you for men of the world, but I find you are only school-boys. Well, this interview ends right here. My price for these four claims is —"

Here he named a very large sum.

"I'll give you an hour to consider about it. If you don't see your way, the claims shall be put up to auction in Dawson City."

"Here!" cried one who seemed to be at the head of affairs, "we shall not want an hour to consider. My advice to my friends is, Close at once. What say you, men?"

"Close," was the answer.

So, much to every one's satisfaction, the business came to an end.

Those speculators were not men of straw; but large though the cheque paid to Wilson was, I have heard that they took gold enough out of the four claims, before the winter ended, to pay it six times over.

Young John had been asked to sell his claim, but refused. He determined to work it for another year at the very least, and so Wilson and his fellow-travellers had to leave him behind.

"Good luck to you, John," said everybody. "And mind," added Wilson, "that when you come to England on your way to Paris, where all good Americans go, you must come to see us all. This is my banker's address."

"That will I," said young John, "and if ever you come to Chicago, just drop in, will you, and see the finest city in all creation."

Young John had never been demonstrative, but now, in saying good-bye to his friends, he displayed far more feeling than any one would have given him credit for.

Indeed, Leebie felt certain that she noticed tears in those honest big blue eyes of his.

But Leebie might have been mistaken.

It had been a busy time for a whole week before our people left the gold diggings. There was a good deal to pack up, but everything they did not want, and all the food they had not used, was put to the hammer. Even the huts they had built and their rough, primitive cooking-utensils and tools were sold.

They retained their guns, however, and Wilson laughingly proposed that they should also keep their well-worn picks and shovels. So these were packed up.

The men they had so befriended were as grieved at parting as young John himself, and long after they started for Dawson City that wild and heartfelt cheer seemed ringing in their ears.

The doctor went to see the grave of poor Lilla, his wife, before he left, and with him went Wilson. He shed a tear or two, he reverently touched the sod, and that was all.

"Good-bye, Lilla, good-bye," he said, or rather

sighed. "For your sweet sake I shall lead a better life than e'er I've done before, that I may meet you in the world above. Good-bye."

The lucky gold-diggers were going to drop down the river, and so on to St. Michael's, in their way to San Francisco.

The steamer was late, however, and they had to wait at Dawson City for nearly a week. And with some considerable anxiety, too. For there was just the chance of the river being hard frozen in that portion of it which sweeps up into the Arctic regions. If so, though it was only autumn yet, there was the disagreeable and dismal probability that they might have to winter somewhere *en route*.

They were not sorry, therefore, when the steamer was at long last floating down the stream.

And I am quite certain that the two dogs, Towsie and Currie, knew as well as any one on board that they were homeward bound.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE WELCOME HOME

Oh, I have roamed o'er many lands,
And sailed o'er many a sea ;
But of all the spots on this sweet earth,
My British home for me !
My British home ! My British home !
Land of the good and free !
And I would spill my Highland blood,
My British home, for thee. — G. S.

THERE are people in this world who really do not know how to enjoy themselves ; people possessed of wealth who do not know in the least how to get any pleasure therefrom.

But neither Wilson nor his friends belonged to this category.

There was a little bother farther north in getting the ship through the floating ice, and a good deal of hammering and poling was needed ; but at last they got clear away, and in good time found themselves, not only at the mouths of the Yukon, but at St. Michael's itself.

They were lucky enough to catch the very last southward-bound steamship, and it was then, and not till then, that Wilson Webb and the boys

thought they were quite justified in building a few castles in the air.

I have said never a word about their correspondence with the old country, during their gold-hunting adventures in Klondyke. Letters came but seldom, yet they kept in touch with friends and relations nevertheless. And from the very latest accounts, all was well at home.

The ship they were now on board of was a very comfortable and, may I add, contented one. But the adjective "contented," some may tell me, can only be used to qualify that which possesses life. Well, somehow I could never help looking at a ship otherwise than as a living, sentient being. I am just that much a sailor, at all events. But the *Annie Boleen*, as the old-fashioned skipper called her, had apparently made up her mind about a good many things. She was fifty years of age if a day, and therefore old enough to take matters easy. "What is the good of hurry-scurry?" she seemed to say. "With all their steam and rattle and noise, with all the first mate's bawling and his use of words not usually found in Scriptural texts, they'll be very clever, indeed, if they can knock more than ten knots out of me. But I'll get there, all the same, one of these days. They may call me an old tub if they like, and tell me that I shake and shiver like an ancient clothes-basket whenever I get a clip on the bow with a big sea or a runaway bit of ice; and the sailors may growl and growl because they

have to pump an hour in every watch. Pooh! what does it matter to me? Why, if a sailor had nothing to growl at, he'd be as miserable a man as they make them. As for me, I'm going to take this watery world easy."

And she did.

She rose and fell on the long, racing seas in an easy showdy-bowdy sort of a way that almost sent one to sleep. When she was stern-down, with her jib-boom in the air, the *Annie Boleen* seemed to be studying astronomy; when she did condescend to dip her prow again, the bottom of the ocean appeared to have such attractions for her, that she was not in the slightest hurry to get on an even keel again.

Well, she rolled to starboard and she swung to port, for all the world as if singing the cradle hymn to herself.

"I say, matie," said the skipper one forenoon to his first officer, "blow me tight, if I don't think that, as the wind is about fair, we hadn't better bank fires and clap sail on her. Blessed if I don't believe we'll get as much out of the danged old consarn under canvas, as under steam."

"A 'danged old consarn,' am I?" said the *Annie Boleen* to herself. "Well, that's all my thanks for keeping afloat so long. That's all I get for having weathered that awful gale off Pumnak, when two other vessels went to the bottom pop!"

"I'm o' your way o' thinkin', sir, and mebbe we'd just as well let the fires out altogether."

"Very well, matie, very well."

So sail was set, and everything on board was far more jolly, ship-shape, and comfortable after that.

"This is what I call something like being at sea," said Wilson Webb, cheerfully. "Bother the rattle and the roar of dirty engines. Puts me in mind of being in a jute factory all the time."

Everybody agreed with him, even the skipper himself, but more especially the engineers and stokers. They could now smoke the calumet of peace at the fo'c'sle head and breathe pure air instead of coal dust.

But what made this voyage all the more delightful to Wilson and his little party, was that there were very few passengers on board except themselves; so, cosy, indeed, were their dinners, and cosier still their evenings, when they sat around the big stove, over which was placed a huge copper coffee-urn that made the merriest kind of music imaginable, hissing and steaming and throwing out a fragrance that was very inviting.

But this was not the only music. For Wilson's fiddle was like himself — never in better form. Even the sailors used to "lay aft" to listen, and more than one was heard to say that if *he* could only bring music like that out of catgut, *he* would never tempt the sea again.

During the first part of the voyage, although the weather was fine, it was very cold, and there were many streams of ice about. The long nights, too,

were dark, and the rattling or bumping on the bows and along both sides of the ship, was terrific when passing through the ice. The pieces were flat and of no great size, but still large enough to bear the weight of many a fur-seal or sea-lion that lay sound asleep on these snow-clad rafts.

Well, with all her self-contentedness, the *Annie Boleen* was a strong and a safe ship. This was fully proved when a storm arose as they were passing through the Aleutian chain of islands.

It was but half a gale at first, and the skipper hoped it would remain at that. He was disappointed; for the glass went tumbling down, and it was necessary to shorten sail to such an extent that the *Annie* was soon staggering along under very little canvas indeed.

A fearful night succeeded a wild and stormy day. Darkness closed around them a full hour before its time. It would be but the truth to say that the ship was enveloped in clouds, and so near aboard did they seem, so closely did they hug the wind-tossed ocean, that the masts seemed to cut them asunder. The gale came tearing up astern, and the waves that now and then broke over the *Annie Boleen* so weighted her down, that both fore and aft there was a momentary silence, which gave one the impression that she was settling slowly down to the black and slimy depths of the northern sea. And every one felt relieved when they heard the roaring of the wind again.

When daylight broke once more murkily over the grey, unsettled ocean, and the storm-clouds went trailing along the horizon, it was found that scarcely a bulwark was broken, and not a single boat was carried away.

"Wa-al," said the mate, "it is true enough, sir, that *Annie* isn't a beauty to look at, but split my mainsail, if she ain't a sturdy old craft, for all that."

Annie Boleen seemed to shake her sides and laugh.

"True, true," the skipper said; "I 'llow she behaved better than many a new one would have done. But several times, matie, durin' the awful storm I did think we were going to Davy Jones."

"Oh! as for me, sir, I made sure of it. Look at this, capting."

He held up a black bottle as he spoke.

"What's that, matie? Ye don't mean to say you were goin' to die drunk?"

"Never a bone of me, sir. No Dutch courage for this child. When I goes to heaven, sir, I goes quite sober. But that's a bottle sealed, as you see, and inside is a letter to my wife. Guess she'd never have got it. Only you never can tell. Can you?"

"No, matie."

The "matie" opened the bottle with his pocket cork screw, and shook out the epistle, which he proceeded to read.

"The S. S. *Annie Boleen*, in the Bearing Seas of Alasker. Beloved wife and children. Wich we're sinkin fast. God be merciful. But thinkin more of you. Heaven will take care

of you. Last thoughts of you. Kiss Johnnie and Ellie. No more — no more.

“Your loving husban,

“‘TOM CASSELL, goin down.’”

“Glad, sir, I didn’t throw it overboard.”

“And so am I, matie.”

“Well, Mr. Wilson,” he added, as that individual came up, making heavy weather, for there still was a rough sea on, “well, how fares it below?”

“We’re all beautiful now.”

“Sleep?”

“Oh, yes, we all slept.”

“Good for you. Well, it’s going to be fine. The glass is going up; and in ten days’ time, why, we’ll all be on shore at San Francisco.”

And sure enough the good weather did come, — blue skies, fleecy clouds, sun-kissed seas, and all the rest of it, just the kind of weather to make a poet out of even the dullest material.

Perhaps our heroes needed rest. I am of that way of thinking, because, for many days now, while the good ship sailed slowly into warmer weather, they felt inclined to sleep most of the time.

But a brisk wind began to blow from the north-north-east, and braced up the nerves of every man on board.

Away forward Jack himself was singing all day long. At eventide, after the main brace was spliced, — for the skipper was generous in that way, — the men leaned about the bows, smoking; and from the

bursts of hearty laughing that rose every now and then, it was evident that many a droll sea-yarn was being spun, and many a tough tale told.

"I say," said Wilson one day, about a week after they had landed in 'Frisco, and were all comfortably housed in a homelike hotel, "how do you think I am going to take you all home from New York?"

"The fastest ocean greyhound," ventured Ernest.

"No, not the fleetest," answered Wilson. "I am in communication with Captain Barnes, and ten to one, I shall buy his splendid ocean yacht."

"Capital!" cried both Ernest and Laurie; and when Maddie and Leebie got an inkling of Wilson's intention, they went into raptures over the idea.

* * * * *

Well, nothing would satisfy the good doctor but crossing the Rockies to have a look at the city of "*We're-all-here.*"

"After that," he said, "I shall purchase a practice in New York; for I love my profession, and idleness would soon kill me."

"But, my dear Doc.," cried Wilson, "I've got an idea that it would do these lads good to have a look at the plains and the cowboys before going home to tame, domestic, but dear old England. We can leave the ladies here and return for them."

Leebie stamped her little foot.

"The ladies are going to cowboy land as well as you," she said. "Aren't they, Maddie?"

"Oh, yes, certainly."

And so it was arranged. So it *had* to be arranged I ought to say.

One way or another the journey was a long and — under other circumstances — it would have been considered a very fatiguing one. As it was, however, everything went as merrily as marriage bells.

When they did arrive at last at “*We’re-all-here*,” the boys turned out *en masse* to greet them, and their welcome was a ten-horse-power one.

The editor himself was the first to extend a brown, hard hand, and it was a case of “shake” all round.

And a very delightful week they spent among the cowboys. Indeed, the more Maddie and Leebie saw of these honest fellows, the better they liked them, so different were they from all the ideas that have been fostered concerning them in our country.

But time wears away, and after a hearty farewell they had to leave cowboy land, and in a fortnight’s time had left New York itself, in the sea-yacht *Anemone*.

Who knows that I may not at some future time tell you of the cruise round the world of this beautiful vessel? For such a cruise has been fully arranged, and by the time the reader’s eyes scan these pages Wilson’s *Anemone* will be far away in foreign lands.

* * * * *

But this reminds me that my story is nearly, if not quite, finished.

When I say that everybody at home was found to

be well and happy, what need is there to expatiate on the welcome the wanderers received ?

Only some things must be told.

Well, Bobbie, the daft, wee pony, was out in the field, and so was Neddy, his companion. Both ran to the gate to meet the boys and Leebie, but their ways of expressing their joy differed somewhat.

Bobbie thrust his warm nose into Leebie's arms, and really seemed to sob and sigh. He had quite given her up for lost, and her sudden return was almost too much for his nerves, and made him hysterical for the time being.

But Neddy, after kicking his heels in the air several times, and even trying to walk on his hind legs, burst into what appeared to be an uncontrollable fit of such hearty laughter, that even the dogs had to take part in it, and in order to allay their feelings fly round and round the field in a circle, but so swiftly that they could scarce be seen.

Wilson and his wife became the guests of the squire for a month and more, and there was not a friend or neighbour all round the country-side, that he did not invite to his house just to hear the travellers speak of all their adventures in the land of gold. Indeed, he even imported people from London to meet them : for this jolly old squire was enthusiastic to a degree.

* * * * *

Well, Farmer Lea himself is a man that can always take things easy, and no doubt he was exceedingly

glad to see Laurie and Leebie, and even Towsie and Currie, all back home safe and sound. On the contrary, Mrs. Lea was somewhat nervous and demonstrative, and she really could not, for a considerable time, believe her own eyes that her children were indeed before her. But those eyes were really considerably dimmed with tears; for if she laughed one minute, she cried the next.

About a week after his return, Laurie proposed that his father should give up the farm and live in a city.

Laurie was sly, for he knew pretty well what the answer would be.

"Leave the country, Laurie! Give up my farm! Never see the green fields and woods again, and the horses that know and love me! No, Laurie, no. When I leave my farm, it will be to take my place in the old churchyard yonder, where my fathers sleep so soundly."

"Father, it was only my fun; but the farm does not pay very well, does it?"

"The rent is somewhat high, my lad."

"Well, father, look!"

Laurie placed a batch of title-deeds in his hand.

The farm was a farm no longer, but a small freehold estate.

"God bless you, my son! God bless you, boy!"

"No, no, father, not for that. What should I do else with my money, I wonder? Oh, I am old enough to know it is more blessed to give than to

receive. But I love the dear old home as much as you. And *I* shall never leave it, either.

"Besides," Laurie continued, "Ernest is going to build a lovely house on the hill beside the lake, and he will thus be our nearest neighbour after he marries Leebie."

"Eh? What? Marries — say it again!"

"Oh, father, Leebie is no longer a child, but a young woman; and I know for certain that, with your consent, what I have said is coming off in a year or two, at most."

"So may they be happy," said Farmer Lea, sinking into a chair; "but dear me! dear me! I never thought that little Leebie would get old — nor myself, either. But — the Lord's will be done."

THE END